Don Quixote E.G.O:: Yearning-Mircalla
Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/62574802.

Rating:
Explicit

Archive Warning:
Graphic Depictions Of Violence

Categories:
F/F, F/M

Fandom:
Limbus Company (Video Game)

Relationship:
Don Quixote (Limbus Company)/Reader

Characters:
Don Quixote (Limbus Company), Reader

Additional Tags:
Vampires, Vampire Bites, Vampire Hunters, Blood Drinking, Blood and Gore, Whipping, Maids, Butlers, Nobility, Dancing, Rope Bondage, Power Dynamics, Kissing, Threats of Violence, Memories, Flowers, Puppets, Graphic Description of Corpses, Emotional/Psychological Abuse, Monster Hunters, Insanity, Character Death, Extremely Dubious Consent, Drugged Sex, Master/Servant, Food, Body Horror, Body Worship, Biting, Bloody Kisses, Breastfeeding, Strap-Ons, Transformation, Wound Fucking, Rough Sex, Sexual Overstimulation

Language:
English

Stats:
Published: 2025-01-28 Updated: 2025-03-27 Words: 28,075
Chapters: 4/?

Don Quixote E.G.O:: Yearning-Mircalla

by AllAborde (Bordementions)

Summary

This flower was once a rose that could have been tiny and beautiful.

But now, the blood it holds gives off a cruel smell.

Drinking and growing giant, it sucked in blood that overflowed from a spring.

Without an end.

It greedily gobbles up the stream of blood with its branched roots.

Notes

I wrote Don with as much inspiration from Carmilla as I could, but trying to stick to pm stuff I made her kind of a first(?) kindred who lives alone in her own castle similar to pre la mancha Don quixote (Father)

She's a lil mean but she'll still be don

Disc server for polls https://discord.gg/WVz3M49h

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1: Stigma

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You were part of the Fanghunt Office, a group of fixers dedicated to the eradication of the bloodfiends. For years, you had trained tirelessly, honing your skills in combat and strategy, preparing for encounters with creatures of unimaginable power. The countless hours spent in brutal sparring sessions, pouring over mission debriefings, and studying the weaknesses of the bloodfiends had hardened you into a weapon. It was supposed to be another hunt—another mark to eliminate in the never-ending war against these monsters. The generation of the kindred had not been specified, but with several Grade 1 fixers at your side, you felt an almost dangerous sense of confidence. The office had faced countless bloodfiends before. The fights were always perilous, the scars from previous encounters still fresh, but you had always emerged victorious.

However this time, you suppose it was simply not meant to be.

The moment your team had breached the manor grounds, the hunt became a massacre. From the cracked earth sprouted barbed vines, lashing out like the snapping jaws of some monstrous predator. These were not ordinary plants. No, they were extensions of her—a grotesque, unnatural manifestation of her power over blood. The vines moved with precision and malice, each thorn seeking flesh with an almost sentient hunger. Your comrades, seasoned warriors who had fought side by side with you for years, were struck down in an instant. Some were pierced through by jagged thorns, their screams of agony cut short as life drained from their bodies. Others were dragged away, disappearing into the blood-soaked undergrowth, their fates left to the darkest corners of your imagination.

The air reeked of iron and decay, a sickening blend of blood and death that clung to your lungs with every breath. The cacophony of battle—the clash of steel, the desperate cries of your comrades—was drowned out by the sickening sound of flesh tearing and bones snapping. You were paralyzed, rooted to the spot as the scene unfolded. Fear gripped you like a vice, your training and instincts utterly failing in the face of such overwhelming power right in front of you.

Eventually however a surge of adrenaline had finally broke your paralysis, and you threw yourself to the side just as a vine erupted from the ground where you had stood. The jagged thorns tore through your coat, grazing your arm and leaving a searing trail of pain in its wake. Rolling to your feet, you gripped your weapon with trembling hands, the familiar weight of the stake offering little comfort against the horror before you.

The world around you blurred as the fight raged on. You caught glimpses of your comrades' final moments—the recent new hire from the north section, her body suspended in the air like a puppet as the vines drained her lifeblood; The strongest among you, a grade 1 who had multiple higher generation kindreds under his belt, roaring in defiance as he was overwhelmed by a wave of crimson tendrils. Their deaths were swift, merciless, and entirely beyond your power to prevent.

"Regroup!" you screamed, your voice cracking with desperation. But there was no one left to hear you. The realization hit like a blow to the gut: you were alone. The others had fallen, their lives snuffed out like candles in a wind storm. The Fanghunt Office—your family, your comrades—was gone.

The kindred descended the grand stone steps of the manor, her shoes leaving faint crimson prints on the slick surface, as if she carried the essence of death itself with every step. Her movements were unhurried, each one exuding an air of command that made the chaos around her feel like a choreographed symphony. She didn't just walk through the garden; she owned it, her presence warping the space into a twisted reflection of her will.

The garden, once an enviable masterpiece of agriculture, was now a shrine to carnage. Blood dripped from the jagged thorns of vines that slithered like serpents across the ground, their movements eerily synchronized with her own. The massive roses, their petals as dark as dried blood, pulsed in rhythm with an invisible heartbeat, exhaling clouds of crimson mist that clung to the air. Their fragrance was intoxicating and sickening all at once, a blend of sweetness and decay that threatened to overwhelm your senses.

She paused at the base of the steps, her eyes sweeping over the battlefield with an expression of serene satisfaction. Her pale skin seemed to glow faintly, as if lit from within by an otherworldly light, the moonlight accentuating every sharp, inhuman feature. Strands of dark, blood-soaked hair framed her face, clinging to her skin like a

crown of thorns.

She began to speak, her voice was loud despite the great roaring noises. "Steeped in the blood of all… yes…! Blossom in euphoria, blossom! Oh, blossom!" Her words were spoken with an almost religious fervor, her tone dripping with adoration as she addressed the ginormous roses. Her hands rose slowly, as if conducting an unseen orchestra, and the vines and roses responded, writhing and blooming with renewed vitality.

Her voice carried a melody that seemed to resonate deep within your chest, stirring a primal fear you just couldn't suppress no matter how hard you tried. Each syllable was deliberate, imbued with a reverence that made it clear this was no ordinary bloodfiend. She wasn't just commanding the carnage—she was reveling in it, drawing power and pleasure from every drop of spilled blood, every life extinguished.

As she continued to speak, the ground beneath your feet seemed to shift, the vines tightening their hold on the earth as though feeding on her words. The pulsating roses began to swell, their petals unfurling to reveal glistening, sharp thorns that dripped with fresh blood.

And yet, amidst the carnage, you still breathed. Somehow, you remained untouched, standing like a phantom in the midst of the lifeless forms of your comrades. The stake in your hand, carved with intricate runes meant to channel the power of the hunt, felt impossibly heavy. It wasn't just the weight of the wood and silver—it was the burden of every failure, every scream that still echoed in your ears. This weapon, meant to bring salvation, now felt like an anchor pulling you deeper into despair.

But there she stood, her back turned to you. The kindred moved with a cruel grace, her hands gently caressing the monstrous roses as if comforting her children. She seemed unaware of you—or perhaps she simply didn't care. All you had to do was strike. One swift, decisive motion to drive the stake through her heart. You clung to that thought like a lifeline, a fragile thread of resolve in the storm of your fear.

Your mind raced, fragments of training and lore flooding your thoughts. You recalled the old texts describing bloodfiends of her power: their origins shrouded in times forgotten, their strength drawn from centuries of experience. They were not gods, no matter how invincible they seemed. Even the most powerful beings in this world had something they were weak to.

Your fingers tightened around the stake, the rough texture digging into your palms as you forced your body to move. Every step felt like wading through quicksand, your legs trembling with unfettered fear. You moved as silently as you could, each footfall carefully placed to avoid the blood-slick vines that writhed and pulsed across the ground.

And then, the moment shattered.

The vines found you before you even got close. They erupted from the ground with a speed and precision that defied reason, coiling around your body like serpents. Their thorns tore into your flesh, each bite a fiery brand of agony that forced a scream from your throat. You struggled instinctively, twisting and pulling against the unyielding grip, but the vines only tightened, digging deeper into your skin.

The pain was excruciating, but worse was the sensation of being utterly powerless. The vines seemed alive, uncaring as they bound your arms and legs, immobilizing you. Blood trickled down your body, pooling at your feet and mingling with the crimson-soaked earth.

The kindred's head tilted slightly, her glowing eyes meeting yours with a gaze that sent ice through your veins. Her expression was one of mild curiosity, as if you were an insect that had wandered too close to the flame. Slowly, she approached, her movements unhurried, the vines parting before her like servants yielding to their queen.

Her hand, cold as marble, cupped the side of your head, her slender fingers brushing through your hair with a tenderness that felt grotesquely out of place. She tilted your head to the side, exposing the vulnerable curve of your neck. The chill of her breath ghosted over your skin, sending a shiver down your spine as her lips parted to reveal those long, curved canines. The anticipation of death coiled tightly in your chest, and you flinched, bracing for the sharp, agonizing bite that would mark your end.

But the bite never came.

Instead, she let out a soft hum, almost a sigh, as if she had grown bored with the idea of killing you. Her fingers lingered for a moment longer, tracing the line of your jaw before pulling away. She took a step back, her smile widening as though she were savoring a private joke you would never understand.

And thus, you awoke, as you did every night, from the suffocating grasp of the same nightmare. The manor's oppressive silence wrapped around you like a suffocating shroud, each breath you took tasting

faintly of the roses outside. The same dream had haunted you for as long as you could remember, a recurring cycle of horror and helplessness. The deaths of your comrades, your friends—each one of them torn apart, their screams fading into the dark recesses of the manor, echoes of a tragedy you could never escape.

Their faces, their voices, still haunted the corners of your mind, like shadows lurking just beyond the reach of the dim candlelight. And each time you awoke, your heart pounded in your chest, your body drenched in cold sweat, as though the terror of their deaths had somehow bled into your waking world. It was the same every night—sleeping only to relive the massacre that had torn your life apart.

You lay in that bed, in the same room where those horrors had unfolded, the walls still stained with the remnants of the bloodshed. But despite the weight of the nightmare still pressing against your chest, you rose. The familiar dread clung to your limbs, but you pushed it aside, knowing there was no other choice. The manor awaited you, as it always did. The oppressive stillness of the room felt suffocating, but you had learned long ago that there was no escaping it, no retreat from the cycle that held you captive.

With a mechanical grace, you dressed in the clothes the Countess had provided—simple yet elegant, an outward symbol of your role in her world. The dark fabric clung to you like a second skin, the fine stitching and luxurious material fit to your person. You had no say in what you wore, no say in how you lived. The Countess made sure of that, as she made sure of everything.

You adjusted the collar of your attire, fingers trembling ever so slightly as you did. There was no room for hesitation. The manor would not wait. Her voice, soft yet commanding, would come again soon, demanding your presence, as it always did. You took a steadying breath, the chill of the air brushing against your skin, and made your way to the main floor.

Each step felt strange, purposely leading yourself to go serve the being that had taken everything from you, but it was a path you had walked countless times. The floor creaked beneath you as you moved, the ancient wood groaning in protest, but you paid it no mind. The hallways stretched out before you, familiar and haunting, with the scent of roses and blood lingering in the air like a phantom. The vines, as always, seemed to pulse with life, their tendrils creeping along the walls and curling around the railings. You had long since stopped questioning their presence. They were part of the manor now, part of

the mad woman that had claimed this place as her own.

The Countess Quixote was a paradox given form, a creature of contradictions that defied understanding. Everything about her felt wrong in a way you couldn't articulate, as though the laws of reality themselves warped around her presence. Her too-perfect features, sculpted like a work of art, seemed to belong to someone else entirely—a visage that couldn't possibly house the madness lurking behind those glowing eyes. Her aura shifted like the tides, pulling you in with a beguiling warmth one moment, only to crush you under the weight of bone-chilling malice the next. It was as though she existed in a liminal space, teetering on the edge of some incomprehensible abyss, and you were powerless to look away.

Despite her theatrical insistence on being called "Don Quixote," there was no nobility in her. She was no knight, no hero, no savior—only a monster cloaked in lies of grandeur. Yet to call her anything less than the title she demanded was an invitation to ruin, a provocation that no sane being would dare risk. Her power wasn't merely in her strength or speed, though those were formidable. It was in the chaos she embodied, the volatility that made every interaction with her a gamble with fate.

One moment, she could be whimsical, her laughter light and melodic as she spun grandiose tales of her imagined exploits. In the next, her mood could shift, her smile twisting into a snarl as her wrath descended like a thunderclap. She was a tempest given flesh, unpredictable and impossible to control. To stand before her was to be caught in the eye of a storm, knowing that at any moment, the calm could shatter into violence.

And yet, despite everything, there was something disarmingly human in her theatrics. A desperation, perhaps, hidden beneath the layers of power and madness—a need to be seen, to be acknowledged, even if it meant playing the part of a twisted chivalry. It was this duality that made her all the more terrifying, for it was impossible to tell where the monster ended and the person began.

The manor she inhabited was a reflection of her fractured psyche, a haunting embodiment of her existence. Once a beacon of wealth and sophistication, it had become a monument to times forgotten, as though her very presence drained it of life. The ivy that strangled the outer walls was no ordinary plant—it pulsed faintly, as if it shared in the unnatural vitality of its mistress. The vines twisted around the cracked stone and sagging arches, their thorns etching patterns into

the ancient building, turning the once-proud estate into a living, breathing tomb.

Inside, the decay was even more pronounced. The air was heavy with the scent of mildew and dust, a stifling atmosphere that seemed to whisper the passage of centuries. Gilded mirrors, their edges tarnished and frames warped, reflected only fractured glimpses of the darkened halls. The intricately carved furniture, once masterpieces of craftsmanship, had rotted into fragile remnants of their former glory, their upholstery faded and torn. Even the chandeliers, once dazzling with countless shimmering crystals, hung like skeletal remains, their grandeur dimmed to a mournful shadow.

This was her kingdom—an empire of rot and shadows, a place where beauty and ruin coexisted in a perpetually uneven balance. But she moved through it with the air of a queen, her every step a declaration of dominion. And though the manor was crumbling, she ruled it with an unshakable conviction, as if she truly believed it was still the grand estate it had once been.

Her whims were as erratic and unpredictable as the tides. Some days, she demanded extravagant banquets be prepared, though no servants remained to carry out such tasks. The dining tables would somehow become laden with decadent feasts—roasted meats, exotic fruits, wines that shimmered like liquid rubies. She never touched a bite, instead sitting at the head of the table, her chin resting on her hand as she stared into the distance, as though imagining herself surrounded by guests.

Other days, she roamed the crumbling halls, her movements restless and her voice echoing through the empty rooms as she delivered impassioned soliloquies to an audience only she could see. She spoke of battles fought, lovers lost, and victories claimed, her words a tapestry of fiction and truth so intricately woven that even you struggled to discern where reality ended and her fantasies began.

And yet, despite everything, she seemed to crave companionship—an audience for her grand delusions. That was where you came in. You were her storyteller, her entertainer, her loyal subject in a court of one. At first, you had tried to resist, clinging to the defiance that had once defined you as a fixer. But resistance was futile. The vines were her enforcers, silent reminders of the consequences of disobedience. A single thorn could send searing pain through your body, a subtle warning that worse was always within her grasp. Over time, the fight drained out of you, and you fell into the role she demanded, weaving

tales to stave off her boredom and ensure your survival.

Her favorites were always the tales of ordinary people—shopkeepers, street performers, factory workers. To her, these lives were alien and wondrous, as unattainable as the sunlit skies she had not seen in centuries. She would perch on the crumbling stone steps of the manor, her crimson eyes gleaming with a childlike fascination that was unnervingly at odds with her monstrous nature. Her posture was casual, but her attention was anything but. She clung to every word, dissecting every detail of the lives you described as though they held the answers to some profound mystery.

Sometimes, her curiosity would break through your narrative, her questions sharp and piercing in their innocence. "Prithee, what doth bread taste like?" she had asked once, her head tilted as she regarded you with a mixture of longing and confusion. "Tis not blood-soaked, but fresh. Warm."

The question had caught you off guard, and for a moment, you were struck by the sheer absurdity of it. How could you explain something so simple, so fundamental, to someone so far removed from humanity? "It's... comforting," you had said after a long pause, your voice hesitant. "It’s warm and soft, and it makes you feel... safe. Like everything is going to be okay, even if just for a moment."

Her expression had shifted then, the cold mask of her face melting into something achingly genuine. A small, wistful smile had graced her lips, and her eyes—usually so intense, so otherworldly—had softened. "Comforting," she had repeated, her voice almost a whisper, as if the word itself was a treasure she wanted to hold onto. For a fleeting instant, she seemed less like the bloodfiend who ruled over the manor and more like a lost soul, yearning for a life she could never have.

But the moment passed, as all moments with her did. The smile faded, replaced by a distant, unreadable expression, and she rose from her seat with an air of regal detachment. "More," she commanded, her voice light but carrying the weight of expectation. And so, you continued, spinning stories of mundane joys and sorrows, feeding her an endless stream of glimpses into a world that would forever remain out of her reach.

Over time, you began to realize that her fascination with your stories was more than mere curiosity. It was a lifeline, a fragile tether to a humanity she had long since lost. And though you hated her, though

you despised the chains that bound you to her will, a part of you couldn't help but pity her. For all her power, all her cruelty, she was utterly, devastatingly alone. And in that loneliness, she clung to you, the only connection she had to the world she had left behind.

And yet, her fascination only served to underscore the chasm between her and the humanity she so desperately yearned to understand. For all her questions, for all her awe, she remained a bloodfiend, a creature bound by her nature. Her childlike curiosity was a stark contrast to the darkness she wielded, a reminder that no matter how human she appeared in those moments, she would always be something other—something that could never truly bridge the gap between her world and yours.

For all her madness, there was a tragic loneliness about her. In those fleeting moments when her guard slipped and the mask of whimsy cracked, you could glimpse a profound sorrow that seemed to bleed through her every word and action. Her laughter, usually so hollow and theatrical, would quiet, and her sanguine eyes would soften, their glow dimming to a flicker of something almost human. It was in these moments that the nightmare of her existence became painfully clear—a being cursed to endure eternity, clinging to delusions to stave off the crushing weight of her solitude.

But these moments were as ephemeral as a passing breeze. Inevitably, the Countess would reassert her theatrical facade, her voice rising in exaggerated proclamations, her gestures sweeping and grandiose. The raw vulnerability would vanish, buried beneath layers of artifice and madness. And you would be reminded, with a sickening jolt, of the reality you were trapped in—a prisoner in a waking nightmare ruled by a creature both pitiable and terrifying.

Her garden was the crown jewel of her dominion, a grotesque masterpiece that encapsulated everything she was. It was a place of staggering beauty and visceral horror, where roses bloomed perpetually, their velvety crimson petals glistening with fresh blood. The source of the blood was never clear, though you suspected it came from the manor itself, as though the very walls wept to sustain her monstrous creation. The air in the garden was suffocating, heavy with the metallic tang of iron that clung to your skin and lingered in your lungs long after you left.

The vines that fed the roses were unlike anything in nature. They writhed and coiled with a sentience that was deeply unsettling, their movements almost serpentine. You had watched them strike, their

thorned tendrils lashing out with predatory precision, ensnaring anything that ventured too close. They didn't simply kill—they dismembered, consumed, and absorbed, their thirst for blood insatiable. To approach the manor uninvited was to court death, a fate suffered by many who had dared to trespass.

You had witnessed their ends too many times. The screams, the wet, tearing sound of flesh giving way, the sickening crunch of bones being pulverized—it was a symphony of horror that played on an endless loop in your mind. And the worst part was the inevitability of it all. No one escaped the roses. No matter how fast or clever they were, the vines always found them, dragged them down, and reduced them to lifeless husks. The silence that followed their deaths was almost worse than the violence itself, an oppressive stillness that seemed to swallow the world whole.

Survival, you learned, was a delicate balancing act. It meant obedience, submission, and an unflinching willingness to cater to her whims. When she demanded a game, you played along, no matter how absurd the rules. When she thirsted for blood, you found a way to provide it, even if it meant luring an unsuspecting traveler to their doom. You had long since stopped questioning the morality of your actions; survival left no room for conscience.

And yet, amidst the endless horror, there were moments of calm—moments that felt almost normal. When she smiled at one of your stories, her laughter genuine and unguarded, it was easy to forget the nightmare surrounding you. In those fleeting instants, she seemed less like a monster and more like a lonely soul yearning for connection. It was a cruel illusion, but it was enough to keep you tethered to the fragile hope that perhaps, one day, something might change.

But hope was dangerous here. The manor had a way of snuffing it out, of reminding you that this was a place where dreams died and despair thrived. The roses bled, the vines devoured, and the Countess ruled over it all—a tragic, merciless queen of her crumbling empire. And you, her unwilling subject, danced to her tune, knowing full well that the music would never stop.

The manor had become your prison, its crumbling walls and thorny gardens a constant reminder of your captivity. Every creak of the floorboards, every rustle of the vines, kept you on edge, your nerves frayed from the constant tension. The air itself seemed alive, heavy with the oppressive presence of the Countess and the unrelenting vines that acted as her watchful sentinels. Time had lost all meaning

here; the days and nights bled together, an endless cycle of fear and monotony. The thought of escape was a distant dream, a fragile hope that flickered faintly in the darkest corners of your mind.

And yet, despite everything, you clung to that hope. You told yourself you would survive, that you would endure long enough to find a way out of this nightmare. But deep down, the truth gnawed at you. The Countess Quixote's power was absolute within these walls, her presence woven into every shadow and whisper. As long as her vines encased the manor like the gnarled fingers of a jealous god, you were hers, body and soul.

Tonight, as on every other night, the castle was shrouded in an almost tangible silence, broken only by the faint, rhythmic drip of water from some unseen leak. The cloying scent of her roses filled the air, sweet and metallic, a constant reminder of the blood that nourished them. The stillness pressed down on you, a suffocating weight that seemed to seep into your very bones. You stood in the grand hall, its vastness both awe-inspiring and oppressive. Moonlight filtered through the grimy stained-glass windows, casting fractured, dim patterns on the dusty floor. The hall felt like the belly of a beast, alive and waiting.

The quiet always meant something. It wasn't peace—it was the prelude to her summons. You had learned to dread that moment, the inevitability of it sinking into your soul like a blade. She always called for you, and no matter how much you tried to prepare, the sound of her voice always sent a shiver down your spine.

And then, it came. Her voice, soft yet razor-sharp, sliced through the oppressive silence like the tolling of a funeral bell. "Mine faithful servant, cometh." The words were quiet, barely above a whisper, but they resonated through the hall as if the walls themselves carried her will. Her voice was soothing in its melody yet laden with a weight that froze the air in your lungs. There was no room for disobedience in her tone; the command was absolute, even if it sounded like it was anything but. For it was what was expected of you.

Your body froze at the sound, every instinct screaming for you to flee, though you knew better than to act on it. You hesitated for a heartbeat, just long enough to feel the faint, menacing stir of the vines that coiled along the edges of the room. They moved with a languid grace, their presence a silent warning. Swallowing hard, you turned toward the source of her voice. The hall stretched before you like a trial, every step you took echoing back at you as if mocking your reluctance. You told yourself you would survive this, as you had every

other night.

Despite the dread gnawing at your insides, you lowered yourself to the ground in a motion that had become second nature. Submission was survival, the only shield you had against her whims. “Mine lord—ah, Don Quixote, thou called?” The words stumbled from your mouth, awkward and forced. You had long since adopted her peculiar speech, a clumsy imitation meant to appease her eccentricities and keep her temper in check.

"Arise." The single word cut through the stillness like a bell tolling in the dark. Her voice was soft, almost soothing, but it carried a weight that compelled your body to obey before your mind could catch up. It was an unspoken truth that her calmness was more dangerous than her fury.

She stood at the top of the grand staircase, one hand resting lightly on the banister. The dim light caught her crimson eyes, making them glint like molten jewels as they fixed on you. Her gaze was unrelenting, stripping away pretense and leaving you bare beneath its scrutiny. She didn’t smile or frown; her expression was a void, a mask of dispassion that was far more unsettling than any display of emotion. It left you grasping for meaning, for any hint of what truly wanted this time.

"I have a favor to ask of thee," she said, but it wasn't. It wasn’t a request—it never was. Her favors were veiled commands, demands cloaked in the pretense of civility.

“Of course, mine lord. Whatever thee desires, thy wish is mine command,” you replied, your voice steady despite the unease gnawing at your insides. You had become adept at playing this part, mirroring her archaic mannerisms in a bid to maintain her favor. “Art thou perhaps hungering? Or doth thou wish me to prepare some form of entertainment?” You offered the usual suggestions, hoping against hope that her request would be something simple, something harmless.

Her eyes narrowed slightly in thought, as though she were deliberating over your words. The silence stretched, the weight of her gaze pinning you in place. You held your breath, bracing yourself for whatever bizarre or dangerous task she was about to unveil.

"Neither." Don’s voice cuts through the air. She descended the staircase with deliberate grace, each step calculated, as if savoring the

power her presence commanded. Her long, fitted coat clung to her form, the deep crimson and dark green fabric mirroring the roses that she commanded, as if the very air itself bloomed in her wake. The high collar of her coat rose dramatically above her head, woven from thorny branches that seemed to pulse with life, blood dripping from between them.

Two large, impossibly perfect roses adorned her long, flowing blonde hair, their petals a vibrant red, the tips kissed with blackened edges. They stood out starkly against her pale complexion, as if they had too taken over her.

She stops a few feet away from you, tilting her head slightly, her crimson eyes locking onto yours with a piercing intensity. The angle of her face sharpens the contours of her features, perfect no matter where you looked. "I hast been observing the peasantry going about thine lives," she says, her tone curious but tinged with disdain. "Some of the activities you humans partake in are most… strange."

You suppress the urge to sigh. Her fascination with humanity often led to strange and unpredictable conversations. It was one of the many peculiarities you had come to endure. “Ah yes, your particular fascination with human ways. Which one did you want to learn about this time?” Your tone remains carefully neutral, devoid of judgment or amusement. Anything less might spark her temper.

Don narrows her eyes, studying you as if to see if you were making fun of her lack of knowledge. Her gaze is unrelenting, and you feel a chill starting to creep down upon you. It’s a look you’ve come to dread, one that suggests she’s attempting to divine your thoughts or test your loyalty. Her uncanny ability to sense deception has left you walking on eggshells more times than you can count. "I have watched the common folk, they dance in pairs," she begins, her voice taking on an almost wistful tone. "They clasp hands and spin about, as though caught in a trance. What be the meaning of this ritual?"

Her use of the word "ritual" strikes you as oddly endearing, a glimpse of her profound misunderstanding of human customs. “It is simply dancing, mine lord,” you reply carefully, keeping your words simple. “An exchange of intimacy or friendship. At times, it is born of want, a fleeting enjoyment. Nothing more.”

Her face shifts, a flicker of disappointment passing over her features. She had expected something grander, something more arcane. "A mere exchange of intimacy," she murmurs, her voice soft but laced with an

edge of dissatisfaction. Her gaze grows distant, unfocused, as if she were pondering the weight of your words. It is a rare moment of quiet reflection, though the tension in the air remains palpable.

Her fingers begin to drum softly against her side, a steady rhythm that feels oddly menacing. The sound cuts through the silence, each tap a reminder of her mercurial nature. You stand frozen, unsure whether her mood will shift toward curiosity or irritation. Finally, she speaks again, her voice deceptively casual.

"Doth thou dance, servant?"

The question catches you off guard, though her tone is calm, almost light. Yet, beneath the surface of her words lies a subtle pressure, an expectation that you answer truthfully—and perhaps even demonstrate.

“I have not in a very long time… but I could at one point.” You offer a cautious response, unsure of where this line of questioning is leading.

Her gaze snaps back to you, her expression shifting to one of genuine interest—curiosity, unmasked and sincere. The sudden change in her demeanor is jarring, though it seems her mood has improved somewhat. "I see," she muses, her tone tinged with an almost childlike wonder. "Dancing seems not merely an exchange of intimacy. Nay, it doth hold a measure of… skill." Her words hint at a growing fascination with the complexities of human behavior. She steps closer, her eyes fixated on you, studying every detail. The proximity is unsettling, her crimson eyes drilling into yours. A hand extends towards your own, both an invitation and a command, an unspoken order. "Yet now, I am most intrigued. I wish to learn, and thou shalt show me."

Hesitantly, you allow her to reach for your hand. A wave of unease washes over you as her cold fingers near.

Don seizes your hand—her palm cool, as you had anticipated. "How strange..." she murmurs, her eyes fixed upon the contact between your hands. "Dancing, is an exchange of intimacy, yet thou hesitate when the time cometh to hold mine own." Her observation is sharp, perceptive, a quiet sting that exposes your discomfort. With a swift and graceful motion, she twirls the two of you together. The suddenness of the movement catches you off guard, breaking the oppressive silence. "This gesture doth bear a certain trust, does it not? A trust I have earned from thee, yet thou art uneasy." Her words carry

a subtle accusation, probing at your loyalty and obedience.

Before you can protest, she takes your other hand, placing it firmly on her waist. Her other hand rests lightly on your shoulder. The proximity is suffocating, her cold breath brushing your skin. She begins to move, guiding you with practiced precision in a slow, deliberate waltz.

You stumble again, your feet momentarily tangling. Don seems oblivious, or perhaps indifferent, continuing the waltz as if you were a skilled partner. Her movements are smooth and graceful, in stark contrast to your clumsy attempts.

"And what if there be none to share this with?" she asks, her voice soft, almost a whisper. "What if one is… alone?"

"What then?"

□□□□□□♣♘♣□□□□□□

Chapter 2: Anther

Chapter Summary

> When the spring's entryway was broken, the blood that must've belonged to someone in the past flows like a waterfall and onto the rose.
>
> As if overjoyed, the rose waves its roots and lies in the pool of blood.
>
> Like that, the rose drooped low and sank into blood.
>
> At the center, a small flower bloomed.

Chapter Notes

> oughhhh

very skin.

"Thou art quiet," she finally murmured, her voice smooth, an attempt at a form of comfort. Something she clearly wasn't used to. "Perhaps thou dost think me strange."

There was no accusation in her words, she was not seeking conflict or attempting to trick you. Merely a voice to confide in.

You tread carefully though as you do not want to set her off accidently. "I think thou art quite unique in thine ways, mine lord."

For a moment, she said nothing. And then, a slow smile curled at her lips, the expression carrying something that did not quite reach her eyes.

"A diplomatic answer," she mused, and though her voice was light, it was clear she still took it somewhat negatively. "Spoken with the care of one who knows that displeasing me is unwise."

The manor around you seemed to warp with her emotions. The shadows stretched unnaturally, reaching toward light as though drawn to it. The thorns entwining the banisters and archways pulsed as though they were alive, tightening their hold, whispering against the wood like hungry things denied a meal.

"But I am not strange," she continued, and there was something eerily casual in the way she said it, as though speaking an undeniable truth. "Nay, it is the world beyond these walls that is strange. Foolish. Lost. It doth cling to its laws, its order, blind to the beauty of chaos, to the freedom of a will unbound."

She exhaled, a soft, wistful sigh. "They call me mad, do they not? The peasants and fixers of thine land. Maybe even thee at times, I wager."

Your mouth was dry. There was no safe answer to such a question.

She released you suddenly, stepping back with a long, greaceful step. The motion sent her coat flaring like a blood-red bloom, and for a moment, she looked more rose than woman—petals and thorns draped in human shape, something beautiful and wretched all at once.

"Dost thou know why the rose is revered?"

"Because it is beautiful?" You tried.

"Because it commands that reverence," she corrected, her voice dipping into something almost reverential itself. "Its beauty is a cruel one. To look upon it is to adore, and yet, to touch is to bleed."

She stepped closer, the fabric of her coat rustling, heavy with that thick floral perfume.

"That is power—true power," she whispered. "To be desired and feared in equal measure."

She gestured vaguely to the roses creeping along the manor walls, the ones winding around the chandeliers and draping like funeral cloth over forgotten portraits. "I hath given them new life, hath made them more than mere decoration. They thrive in my presence, as all things do. And yet, still, they whisper against mine ears in the dead of night, whisper secrets only I may hear."

Her hand drifted toward one of the roses at her collar, fingertips brushing against its blood-dark petals. Before looking up to you.

"Do they whisper to thee, too?"

Something cold settled into your gut, for this wasn't something you could fake. What if she pressed you further?

You swallowed and shook your head. "N-no they, they do not."

She hummed in thought, taking another step forward, close enough that you could feel the warmth of her breath against your skin.

"Perhaps they shall, in time."

Her crimson eyes drift toward the distance, unfocused, as though seeing something you cannot. Her mind wanders to places beyond your reach, beyond your comprehension—places you could never hope to follow.

"Come," she says suddenly. She turns sharply on her heel, the motion crisp. "I wish to show thee something."

You stumble, following quickly as she strides toward the towering double doors of the manor's main hall, her presence alone commanding them to part. The roses slithering across the floor recoil, curling away from her path obediently, moving as though they possess a will of their own. The sight unsettles you, the way the vines ripple and coil, alive yet not, bound to something beyond nature’s laws.

She does not look back to see if you follow.

The manor groans with your every step, the walls themselves seeming to breathe, to listen. The scent of roses grows heavier as you continue further, suffocating in certain patches of air.

The further in you go the more the halls stretch endlessly before you, vast in size, from an age long before your own. The towering doors creak open as you both approach them. Beyond them lies a corridor you do not recognize, though you have walked these halls a thousand times before.

The architecture twists upon itself—too sharp, too elongated, space warping in ways that should not be possible. The manor has never been a place of comfort, but now, it feels as though you had never walked through this place in your whole life.

Don Quixote walks ahead at a steady pace, savoring the moment as if tasting a nice wine. The tap of her boots echoes in the stillness, stretching out far across the room and coming back, distorted by the space around you.

"Tell me," she says, her voice sounds out. Emenating from all sides as it echoes. "What dost thou fear most within the confines of this palace?"

The question is spoken lightly, as though it is nothing more than idle curiosity.

"I do not know, mine lord."

She laughs, a quiet, lilting sound. "A poor falsehood," she muses, almost playfully. "Thou shouldst not make a habit of lying to me. It is unbecoming."

The amusement lingers for only a moment before she exhales, shaking her head as if indulging a child’s foolishness. "No matter. In truth, I believe I already know the answer."

Her stride does not falter as she stops before a set of smaller doors, their frames warped, the wood pulsing from vines that have rooted inside. Without hesitation, she pushes them open.

The room beyond is dark.

The air is dreadful, stagnant like a damp shroud. The scent of roses is

overwhelming here, cloying, clinging to your lungs.

The light flickers from somwhere, filling into the space, illuminating twisted shapes draped in vines. No—not vines. Thorns. Thick, gnarled, and pulsing with sickly life, weaving through and around the figures trapped within.

Bodies.

So many human bodies, piled on top of each other. Posed like statues throughout the room, like a storage room full of mannequins.

The roses have claimed them now, their petals blooming from torn flesh, their roots burrowing deep into exposed bone. Their faces are frozen in an expression that teeters between bliss and agony, as though even in death they are uncertain whether to weep or to rejoice, dolls held upon great thorny strands of hatred and pain.

Your stomach churns, an ungodly sight that you couldn't have possibly prepared yourself for even if you had known.

"Beautiful, is it not?" Don sighs, stepping forward, her voice soft. She reaches out, her fingertips brushing against a rose blooming from the hollow of a ribcage, caressing it as one might a lover. "A far kinder fate than what the world would have offered them. Here, they are eternal. Steeped in bliss."

You swallow hard, forcing bile back down. "Are these...?"

"Some," she admits, knowing exactly what you were going to ask.

Tracing her fingers idly along the length of a thorn-covered vertebrae. "Others, simple wanderers. Strays, with nowhere to belong." She turns to you then, her crimson gaze locking onto yours, expectant. "I hath given them a place. A purpose. They should be grateful."

Her voice carries no doubt, no question.

She watches you carefully now, waiting, searching. She wants you to understand. She wants you to agree with her, to make sure that you can see that what she is doing here in the dark corners of the manor is truly a good thing.

You do not, and despite your attempts at seeming neutral its clear to her that you do not.

The light in her eyes dims, her expression shifting into something more solemn. The silence stretches thin and brittle, as it becomes obvious to you that she has understood.

Then, suddenly, she is upon you.

The air leaves your lungs. The unnatural chill of her presence washes over you, freezing you in place. Her golden hair spills over your shoulder as she tilts her head, her eyes half-lidded. The corner of her lips twitches in something that is not quite a smile.

"Thou dost not approve," she murmurs, the words smooth and gentle, as if to not scare you. "Why?"

The answer should have been obvious for anyone who understood the horrifying reality presented for them. It is practically staring you head on, screaming at you. But to voice those concerns, to even infer to her that you were opposed to her actions would be to invite ruin.

"I just... I dont understand." You barely manage to squeak out, not even close to the things you truly wanted to say.

Her gaze lingers on you, sharp, dissecting. Then, ever so slowly, her lips curve.

"Then I shall teach thee."

Before you can react, her hand pushes against your back. You barely even have time to draw a breath, her strength undeniable. You stumble, your foot catching on the twisted edge of an exposed root, and suddenly, the roses are all around you as if they had been given a willing offering.

The petals caress your skin with an gentle touch, perhaps unsure if they've been given permission to envelop their newest addition. The thorns press dangerously close, but they do not bite.

But the encroaching vines are the least of your worries, because for a moment in the corner of your eye.

The bodies in the vines seem to shift.

At first, you think it is a trick of the light, a cruel deception of shadow as a result of the maddening situation. But then—no. Their expressions, which seemed frozen not too long ago, twist. They begin shifting ever so slightly, as if aware of your presence. As if watching.

Don is close again, her breath is curling along the inside of your ear, whispering sweet nothings.

"Observe mine dear servant," she purrs, the words drawn out in a theatrical tone. "Observe the bloom of flesh carefully tended, given true freedom amongst the embrace of the flora."

Your breath stutters, strangled by the thick perfume of roses, by the weight of her presence pressing in from all sides. There is something else that you're breathing, too thick and warm to be air, murdering in its sweetness. You try to take a step back, to steady yourself—but the roses do not allow it.

And then you see it.

A hand twitches.

Fingers, curled against thorn-ridden vines, flex, as if grasping at something just beyond reach. A shallow rise and fall of a chest. A shuddering exhale despite the lungs haven long been carved away, barely more than a whisper against the rustling petals.

The realization slams into you like a physical blow.

They are alive.

A choked gasp catches in your throat. Your pulse hammers, wild and erratic, as you stagger backward, eyes darting frantically across the room. Searching. Desperate. You pray—pray that its not real, that your mind is unraveling under the watch of this wretched place.

But then you see their eyes slowly blinking open.

Unfocused. Glazed with something dreamlike, something absent and yet, undeniably aware.

These are not corpses having yet too be buried within the depths of the earth. Not remains of marred bodies, those who have already begun their journey to whatever afterlife is beheld to those cursed with a consciousness.

They are prisoners within their own wretched and decaying bodies.

And you know them too.

You take another step back, only for your heel to knock against another root, sending you falling backwards. Your hand brushes

against something, and you turn to find that these entangled figures surround the entire room, and the moment your fingers graze the damp, thorn-pierced flesh—

It calls out to you in a tired, yearning voice.

"Where...?"

Barely a whisper, barely more than the sound of leaves rustling in the wind, but it is there. Real as the very stones beneath your weary, calloused hands.

Your vision tunnels. The walls seem to close in, the lies you've clouded yourself with fade in and out of existence. The roses seem to breathe with them—each inhale shallow, each exhale trembling.

Another voice.

"It hurts…"

And another.

"Haha..."

You recognize their voices.

The Fanghunt office, your office.

The men and women who had fought beside you. The ones who had stormed this accursed manor with steel drawn, Fixers of the highest caliber, the strongest among you that you knew. You remember the battle—the clash of blades, the desperate struggle against her power, the splattering blood against your face.

You remember standing beside them, willing to die for that same cause. The stake in your hand as you hoped you too could follow in a swift death fighting for the thing you had trained for. Hoping that the fate that had befell them would be quick, that there would be no suffering in the way that they went out.

Yet here they are.

Rooted in place, ensnared by the roses that have devoured their flesh. Their lips part, murmuring soft, broken things, their voices blending into a dreadful harmony. Some are incomprehensible, lost to delirium. Others are unmistakably sentient to a concerning degree.

"Please…"

The word is so faint you almost miss it. Your gaze snaps toward the source, toward a man whose name you cannot bring yourself to say. His eyes—hazy, barely clinging to recognition—find yours. There is something there, something still lingering beneath the layers of corruption, of decay. A spark. A plea.

And Don watches it all.

She stands a step away, draped in elegance, untouched by the horror surrounding her. Her crimson gaze gleams, not with cruelty, nor pity. Detached amusement, like a child watching an insect struggle beneath their fingertips.

“Dost thou see now?”

Her voice is soft, almost coaxing, as if speaking to a frightened animal. She steps closer, her fingertips gliding over the nearest figure—a woman, once proud, once unyielding. Now, her armor is cracked, overgrown with ivy, her once-polished steel rusting beneath the roses’ cruel embrace. A single bloom emerges from her shoulder, petals unfurling like a wound, its roots burrowing deep into exposed muscle.

The woman does not react.

Save for a slow, languid blink.

Save for a breathy, absent-minded sigh.

Don hums, tilting her head as she trails her fingers along the pulsing vines.

“A cruel world did forsake them,” she muses. “Left them to rot, to wither in despair. But I hath given them sanctuary.”

Her fingers drift to the edges of a thorn-laced petal, rolling it between her fingertips with a reverence befitting a priest.

"No hunger. No pain. No fear." She turns to you then, smiling, and there is something in her expression—something patient, as if there is absolute certainty that she can get through to you.

“Only beauty, longevity, love.”

The roses breathe slowly, almost making it look as if the very walls are expanding and contracting.

And the voices murmur still, weaving into the very air itself, even as you try to shut them out.

This is not salvation.

This is not beauty.

This is wrong, a horrible mockery of what one could considering being lost in a hazy daydream.

Don's gaze flickers, searching, and then—her lips curl into a slow, knowing smile.

"Dost thou not envy them?"

And in the silence, the roses wait for your answer.

But it is a patience that is not without limit.

She creeps closer still, slow and measured, the silk of her garments whispering against the floor. The very walls too lean in, as if intrigued on if you would be willing to take your place among them on the stage. When she speaks, her voice is low, a thread of velvet winding into your ear, soft enough to almost sound kind.

"Come now, mine dear servant surely, thou understandeth?" Her tone is coaxing, as though she is revealing some profound truth meant only for you. "The world beyond these walls is naught but suffering. But here—here—thou may join them. To remain by mine side, to bloom as they hath. To be forever surrounded by those who thou have thought were lost."

Her hand lifts to your cheek, fingers pressing lightly against your skin. The gesture is gentle, deceptively tender but edged in invisible thorns.

Her touch lingers. Then drifts downward, tracing the line of your jaw.

"Thou wouldst look most divine in red."

Your breath shudders, beneath you the roses are beginning to whisper your name, their voices melding with hers.

Suddenly a sharp sting pricks at your ankle. Then another, and another, each one slowly getting higher.

You flinch. The breath you had been holding slips from your lips. You try to step back, but something tightens around your leg.

The roses.

Their stems slither like grasping fingers, curling up your calf, their thorns pressing just enough to bite—not deep enough to wound, but enough to make sure that you aren't going anywhere.

And then the voices are louder, piercing into your head.

Soft at first. A breeze stirring through the petals.

The whispers rise, slow and mournful, a dreadful crescendo of longing.

You can hear them all now. Their pleas wrap around you like needles, sinking into the marrow of your bones, pressing against your skull, their words threading through your thoughts until not a single one of them are yours.

You draw your gaze down to the tightening roses for but a moment.

Her arms slide around you, the embrace slow, languid—intimate beyond doubt. The weight of her presence coils around you, a phantom limb that refuses to be cast aside.

“Thou doth resist,” Her breath against the shell of your ear feels like fire where it touches. “Yet I canst hear thine heart waver.”

The words slither through you, sinking deep, curling around the doubt festering in your chest.

“Why doth thee hesitate?”

A pause. Then, lower—

"Is it fear? Is it doubt?"

Her fingers trail along the curve of your shoulder then to your slowly, then to your collarbone. “There is naught left for thee beyond these walls now.”

The petals shift beneath you. The roses breathe.

“The world outside is cruel.”

A voice in the vines gasps, as if drowning.

“It hath taken all from thee—thy comrades, thy purpose, thy home.”

Another whisper, hoarse and broken beyond reasonable existence.

"But I shall not, I shalt never."

Her words are spun from silk, soft as a lullaby.

“Here, thou wouldst never be alone.”

A thorn presses against your knee .

"Here, thou may rest, unburdened."

The vines climb higher, winding around your thigh, the ascent increasing in speed.

“No more struggle.”

Another voice from the roses, heavy with something between sorrow and accusation—

“No more grief.”

A breath, rasping and strained—

"Only the beauty of eternity,” Don whispers, her words a caress against your skin, “entwined within mine garden."

The roses tighten.

Their thorns press deeper.

The voices call your name again and again, each syllable dripping with something unbearable and desperate. The weight of it coils around your ribs, constricting you, demanding that you make a decision.

Your mind screams at you to submit.

To let go.

To sink into the warmth of the roses, into the promise of her words, into something beyond pain, beyond grief, beyond self.

And for a moment—

Just a moment—

You feel yourself slipping.

Your thoughts grow distant, your limbs numb. The embrace of the roses is not cruel, not painful. It is soft. Gentle. They whisper of rest, of stillness, of eternity without sorrow, and it would be so easy—so terribly easy—to stop fighting.

But something deeper screams against it, to give up here would be to lose everything.

A voice not drowned by the roses, not yet lost to the thorns.

Yours.

Your fingers clench.

Your teeth grind.

And through the suffocating haze, you force your voice out.

It is hoarse. It is weak.

But it is yours.

“No.”

And the garden stills instantly, as if cut from the puppet strings that were holding them aloft.

Your voice had been barely more than a whisper, yet it rings louder than any cry.

The whispers stop. The roses hesitate.

And Don, she stiffens as if you had just stabbed her directly in the heart.

For the first time, true silence settles between you. A silence not of reverence, nor patience, but pure unfettered stillness void of any meaning. Any and all things she might have felt, shattered by a single word.

Slowly, her arms fall away. Her touch vanishes like mist, retreating as though it had never been there at all. The roses, once eager to claim you, loosen their grip, slithering back into the stone like serpents recoiling from fire. The voices fade, their desperate murmurs swallowed once more by the hush of the chamber.

Don steps back a couple paces, as if stumbling away from a pursuer.

Her crimson eyes are down-trodden.

There is no outburst. No fury. No cruel insistence against your wishes, demanding you see things her way.

Only silence, followed by the meek opening of her mouth.

“…I see.”

The words are soft, devoid of warmth. Devoid of anything at all.

She tilts her head, studying you with quiet intensity, as though you are something foreign to her now. A puzzle whose solution has slipped just beyond her grasp. And for the first time, you sense an emotion from her that is not an extreme of either amusement or insanity.

Just mild displeasure.

Not the kind that burns hot, that flares into wrath or spite.

But something deeper. Colder. A displeasure that lingers beneath the surface, one of disappointment.

Her exhale is slow. Then, as if nothing had happened at all, she turns away from you completely.

"Very well, mine servant," she murmurs, glancing back over her shoulder. "Another time, perhaps."

And just like that—

She leaves.

Her footsteps are soft, almost soundless as she disappears into the dim candlelight at the end of the hall.

You should feel relief. At the fact that you were spared the cruel awful fate of becoming another captive of the roses, all autonomy stripped away as you are bound in their thorns.

But there is no relief.

There is only the gnawing certainty that something has changed between the two of you.

You exhale shakily, rubbing your palm against your thigh where the thorns had pressed. The skin is unbroken, yet the ache lingers, as

though the roses had left their mark on something deeper than flesh. Had intruded inside your body where you were unable to see.

Shaking it off you make your way out of this hidden room, following back on the path that had taken you there.

You take a step forward. Then another.

The sound of your own movements is unnervingly loud, echoing too sharply in the empty space. A trespasser in sacred ground, is it because she is not with you? Or maybe because you feel as if though you have betrayed her?

Your gaze drifts toward the staircase, toward the shadows where Don had disappeared.

She let you go.

She gave up.

But it had been too easy.

Don Quixote was not one to abandon a game so quickly. Not when she had invested herself so thoroughly, had whispered promises in your ear, had wound her vines around your very soul.

Yet at the first utterance of defiance, she had simply walked away.

No argument.

Just—

That look.

That unreadable, empty look that had settled in her crimson eyes.

A look that did not belong to someone who had lost.

A look that belonged to someone who had merely adjusted their course, or believed that things would come to pass eventually, a minor mishap.

The manor is her domain. You are merely a guest. A trespasser, tolerated only at her whim.

And if she has relinquished her grip for now, it is not because she has accepted your refusal.

A deep breath steadies you, though it does little to dispel the lingering unease.

You need to move. Staying in this place, standing still, only feeds into the oppressive pull of the manor's grasp.

You turn toward the hall, toward the door that leads to your quarters. Sleep will not come easily tonight, but you must try.

Yet, as you take another step, something shifts.

A sound, so faint it is almost imperceptible.

A whisper.

A breath.

You whip around, heart hammering.

Nothing.

Just the same stretch of roses that has lined the door frame to your room since you started sleeping there.

Right?

□□□□□□ □□□□□□

You wake up the next day, the same as usual.

No terrible fate had befallen you during the night for your sin of denial the day before. No blade piercing your throat, no thorny restraints tearing you limb from limb.

As the day had started it was the same as any other, things seem almost normal—at least, as normal as life within this accursed manor can be. You fall into the usual rhythm, obeying her summons,

enduring her rambling monologues about the trivial curiosities of human life, and navigating the labyrinthine games she so enjoys playing. Entertaining her as a servent of your station would.

But soon something was painfully different, so dreadfully wrong.

It is subtle at first. A lingering stare that lasts too long, the gleam in her crimson eyes catching motions in a way that makes them appear brighter, sharper—almost feverish. The way her fingers twitch slightly when she speaks, as though suppressing some unspoken excitement. The odd new tone in her voice, her words dipping into an almost sing-song quality before she reins herself back in.

And then it worsens.

She starts speaking to things that aren't there.

Her words are still addressed to you, but her gaze strays past you, fixed on the empty air, as if expecting something to answer.

At first, you assume it's another one of her games, a theatrical display of her eccentricity.

But then, one evening, as you sit across from her in the grand dining hall, she tilts her head, listening, before letting out a soft, amused laugh.

"Ah, thou dost jest," she murmurs, swirling the deep red wine in her glass. "Surely mine guest would not deceive me so readily."

You do not respond.

You don't know how to.

She is not speaking to you.

Her gaze is fixed on the empty chair beside you.

You glance at it.

There is nothing there.

You tell yourself that there is nothing there.

But the next time she laughs, the hair on the back of your neck stands on end.

And so when dinner has ended and you retrieve all of the plates and wares. She dismisses you to continue talking to her other patron.

Even the next day, when you enter the main hall one morning to find her standing atop the long dining table, arms outstretched, her coat fanning behind her like a cape of billowing waves. The high collar of her attire juts out like twisted spires, giving her the silhouette of some grand, nightmarish deity.

“The court is assembled,” she declares to the empty hall, her voice booming throughout the vast chamber. “And the accused stand before me in silent shame.”

She turns, locking eyes with you the moment you step through the doorway.

“And thou, mine servant, art to act as witness. Relay to these fiends what hath taken place here on this day”

She gestures grandly at the chairs lining the table, as if they are filled with an unseen audience, expectant and waiting.

Your mouth feels dry.

You open it to speak—to ask, to plead for an explanation—but then she moves.

One graceful motion, her hand extending outward, fingers curling as though plucking something from the air.

She grips nothing—

Yet she yanks downward, and the air itself seems to break.

The sound of tearing flesh fills the silence, wet and visceral.

A sharp, ragged inhale—choked, shuddering.

There is no one there.

But the sound persists, and there is blood. Spilling from her hands, not from an open wound, but seemingly from the very air itself.

She turns back to you, smiling, utterly delighted.

“Justice,” she breathes, releasing her grip.

The sound of a body hitting the floor, the shifting of the tablecloth where it would have fallen.

She steps down from the table, her heels clicking softly against the polished wood, the sound unnervingly delicate after the grotesque spectacle she had conjured. As she brushes past you, her coat flares slightly, the scent of roses trailing in her wake.

And then she is gone.

You remain rooted in place.

The chair she had gestured to stands empty.

But the room does not feel empty.

Soon the changes become physical too.

Doors that should have led to the library instead open into hallways you do not recognize, lined with portraits of people whose faces seem to shift when you aren't looking. The corridors stretch impossibly long, winding in directions that should be impossible for the outside structure. Lights without a source, casting shadows that do not match their origins.

And the roses.

You wake to find them creeping further along the walls, their thorned vines coiling like serpents, their blood-red petals blooming in places they hadn't before. They twist around the bedposts, their presence a silent threat. The scent is overwhelming now—thicker than before, saturating the air, curling in your lungs until every breath is laced with their sickly, disgusting sweetness.

They whisper at night just like they did on that day. You do not understand the words, but you know they are speaking to you. Or about you.

One evening, she calls for you.

You find her standing before a mirror, its gilded frame warped, curling like vines overtaking stone. She stares at her reflection, unmoving, her expression unreadable.

The glass is subtly distorted—not like a mere flaw in craftsmanship, but as though something behind it is pressing forward, straining to be seen. Colors ripple oddly, shifting in ways they shouldn't, the reflection a beat too slow to mimic reality.

She does not turn to you as she speaks.

"Tell me," she murmurs wistfully, "when thou dost gaze upon thy own reflection dost thou ever wonder if it is truly thee staring back?"

Her fingers drift across the glass, trailing over the surface with a delicate touch.

Her reflection however does not follow that movement.

Slowly, as if sensing your realization, she smiles.

Her eyes meet yours through the mirror.

And her reflection—

Her reflection is still looking at you, even after she turns away.

You're going insane you have to be, theres no other explanation for the things happening.

And so you begin to take note of everything, where things should be, what they should sound like. What color they are, you map everything out in such utterly intricate detail that you even take the time to find your way back to the room of bodies.

Much to your relief they are still there, not breathing not blinking, nothing.

After you've written it all to memory, down to the very number of roses that you could find around the manor. You tuck the journal under your pillow, away from any prying eyes and reaching vines.

But you awaken to none of it, instead your ears are met with the sound of distant laughter.

Soft, pleasant conversation drifts through the halls. Sunlight filters through your window in golden shafts, warming the floor, casting rich patterns against the fine embroidery of your curtains. The air smells of morning dew and fresh linen, clean and crisp.

You sit up, bracing yourself for the sight of roses encroaching upon your bed, their vines winding around your limbs.

But there are none.

Only the faint scent of flowers lingers, having all but completely diluted, subdued among the rest of the wonders.

When you step out of your room, the manor is alive.

Servants bustle through the halls, clad in fine livery, their movements brisk and efficient. They acknowledge you with polite nods, offering quiet greetings as they pass. In the grand hall, guests mingle in elegant gowns and tailored suits, their laughter weaving through the air in a symphony of idle pleasantries. The chandeliers glow with warm, golden light, their crystals catching the candle flames in glimmering reflections.

You grip the banister at the top of the staircase, your breath unsteady.

The manor had been empty, not a soul but you and Don.

It had been all but dead.

Silence had stretched for so long that you had forgotten what voices sounded like, what the press of a crowd felt like.

And yet—here they are.

They move as if they have always been here.

You descend the steps slowly, cautiously, slipping between clusters of faceless nobility. Their conversations swirl around you, indistinct murmurs of laughter and gossip. Servants balancing silver trays laden with food—roasted meats, honeyed fruits, pastries so delicate you can taste them with your other senses.

At the long dining table, guests are already seated, their goblets brimming with deep red wine.

You see them too, the bodies from yesterday.

The ones who died.

They sit among the guests, their faces untouched by suffering, their bodies whole and unmarked. They drink, they laugh, they speak as though nothing had ever happened.

Your fingers twitch.

Your mind screams that this is wrong.

But—is it?

They are here.

You take a step forward, but something shifts beneath your foot.

Roses.

Their vines have spread across the floor, curling around the legs of chairs, winding up the grand pillars. Their petals are richer than before, deeper in hue, their scent thick as honey.

“Ah,” comes a familiar voice.

At the head of the table, Don stands.

She is adorned in her finest coat of crimson and deep green, golden hair spilling over her shoulders in perfect waves, adorned with roses that bloom against the fabric.

She smiles.

“Mine servant,” she purrs, gesturing to the grand feast before her. “I had feared thou wouldst not awaken in time for our morning meal.”

You force yourself to breathe.

“What is this?” you question.

She tilts her head, fingers trailing along the goblet in her grasp. “Why, 'tis the grandest of banquets, prepared in mine honor. The castle hath mended itself, and so too hath its denizens returned.”

You shake your head. “This isn’t real.”

Her smile however, does not falter.

“And yet,” she muses, “thou dost see it, dost thou not?”

Your pulse pounds in your throat.

She takes a slow step toward you.

“Thou dost hear them. Speak with them. Thou dost smell the feast,

dost taste the wine." Her voice lowers, her words curling around you like the vines at your feet. "If thou wert to reach forth and touch them, their skin would be warm, their pulse steady beneath thine fingers."

Your fingers curl into your palms as she watches you carefully.

"So tell me, mine servant…"

Her voice is barely above a whisper, yet it burrows deep into your bones.

"If all the world believes a lie, dost it not become truth?"

She lifts a goblet from the table, swirling the deep red liquid within. The candlelight catches in its depths, making it gleam like freshly spilled blood. She watches you over the rim, her gaze patient, expectant.

You look back at your friends. They meet your gaze with soft smiles, their eyes bright with recognition, warm with familiarity. Someone lifts a glass in your direction, a silent toast. Another waves you over, beckoning you to sit, to eat, to drink.

You hear them call your name. Their voices are clear, vibrant, free of pain. As though they had never suffered. As though they had never died.

The manor is full once more.

The dead have returned to life.

But... would it hurt to indulge in this? Even if, some how, some way this was fake, would it truly be so wrong to enjoy it?

To sit and drink with the friends whom you thought you would never see again? This couldn't be an illusion, you could hear it—feel it with your own damn fingers.

And so you did, you ate, you drank, and you reminisced.

□□□□□□ □□□□□□

Chapter End Notes

chapter 4 will have my first actual smut, it wont be too explicit but I'm gonna try to make it more detailed and intimate. Let me know if yall would like that or just actual shameless smut.

Chapter 3: Style

Chapter Notes

https://discord.gg/GPBNYYxExz

Next chapter is sexo so yeah stay tuned

□□□□□□֎♘֎□□□□□□

But even you cannot stay blind forever.

No matter how much you try to dismiss the signs—no matter how often you convince yourself that they were always there—you cannot ignore them.

A stray petal on your pillow when you wake, soft as silk, the color of freshly spilled blood.

The teeth marks of thorns indented into the leg of your chair, something was coiled around it in the dead of night; no longer there.

A whisper of red in the corner of your eye that vanishes when you turn your head, but you are sure beyond all doubt you saw something.

But the most unnerving thing, the roses are everywhere, more numerous than when you had last counted.

You've seen her whispers to the flowers, and they whisper back. You press your ear to the petals, straining to hear. Nothing.

But they are louder than before.

They sprout between the cracks in the floor, their roots burrowing deep into the stone like veins beneath pale skin. They creep along the

walls, curling over paintings, choking the sconces, twining around the chandeliers like serpents. They slip into your wardrobe, pressing between the folds of your clothes, their scent clinging to the fabric, to your skin, to your very breath.

They are in the food.

The other day a single crimson petal had drifted onto your plate, resting atop a slice of roasted meat. It shuddered slightly, rocking in place slightly as though it had only just fallen, though you did not see it descend. There are not any roses above you, no flower in sight, yet there it had lied, a silent interloper upon your meal. But it would have been ungrateful to waste an entire dish over something so small—so meaningless—so you plucked it off and kept eating.

Looking over you would always find them in your goblet too, floating atop wine like a gondola atop dark waves. When you drink, the taste is not quite right. The scent has somehow imbued itself into the liquid, thick and syrupy, like honey left too long in the sun.

The servants do not seem to notice either. They move through the manor, unbothered by the encroaching bloom, their hands and clothes dusted with pollen, their eyes hazy yet full with a clear directive. The guests carry roses in their pockets too, twirling them idly between their fingers, slipping them delicately into one another's hair. They do not speak of them. They do not react when the vines curl around their chair legs, when the petals drift through the air like autumn leaves.

You see them, though.

You see them everywhere.

They are growing, growing, always growing. They shouldn't be. Why are they?

When you awaken from restless sleep, rose petals litter your bed, pressed against your skin as if you had been cradled in a garden through the night. The taste of soil on your tongue. Your fingers sink into the mattress, but it is not fabric beneath your touch—it is damp earth.

When you go to the bathroom to look in the mirror, they cling to your palms, your neck, the inside of your mouth. You cough, and something sweet lingers at the back of your throat, small red flakes pepper out of your mouth. Easily visible against the porcelain of the sink.

You see them drifting through the halls, carried by an unseen breeze. You step through them, but there is no air current—just the silent procession of petals, moving toward some unseen destination.

You rub your eyes, but when you open them they are raining down now, drifting down like embers from a great unseen fire. You blink, and they are gone.

Something is wrong.

Something is very, very wrong.

Yet, as the days pass, the thought slips from your grasp like sand through your fingers. It becomes harder to remember why the roses bother you so. Why would you come to despise something so beautiful. Harder to recall what the manor once looked like before it became a garden—before it became this beautiful, lovely garden.

And oh, how lovely it is. How captivating.

How easy it is to surrender, to let yourself be held, to let yourself be tended—like one more flower in the gardener's care.

Oh the gardener.

Mine lord.

Don Quixote

Ever blossoming, ever radiant.

She is beautiful. You know this as surely as you know how to breathe, though you cannot recall when you first thought it—if it was ever truly your thought to begin with. It sits in your mind like a seed, long buried, sprouting before you even realized it had been planted. And now it grows, roots twisting through your thoughts, blooming into admiration so saccharine it nearly chokes you.

You do not question it. Or—you do, for a moment, a flicker of unease like a weed pushing through the cracks, but then the thought slips away, carried off by the wind before you can grasp it. She is beautiful.

She is the sun at the heart of the garden, golden-haired and aglow beneath the great lights of the halls. The roses woven into her locks are more vivid than ever, each petal pulsing faintly, rising and falling in time with her breath as if they live and breathe with her.

The coat of crimson and green drapes regally over her shoulders, its colors deep as the finest tapestry, its weight resting upon her like the vestments of a sainted monarch.

Her eyes—endless crimson, deeper than any wine, richer than any sunset—watching. Watching.

She watches you. Always.

There are no weeds here. The gardener prunes the weeds for they are a weakness. She plucks the wilting for they have no place in her ideal eternity. She hasn't touched you yet. That means you're still growing, right?

Her smile lingers when you inhale too deeply, when your steps slow, when your gaze catches, unwillingly, on the drifting petals.

And though she does not speak of it, though she does not remark on the way your hands tremble or the way your breath catches in your throat when you stare too long at the endless bloom—

The scent of roses clings to you. It burrows into your skin, soaks into your clothes, coats your tongue with every word you try to form. It fills your lungs, thick and all-encompassing. Your thoughts move sluggishly through the haze, slow and warm, dripping like nectar from the walls of your mind. You can scarcely recall what the air used to taste like, what it felt like before it became this heady, smothering thing.

And through the haze, one detail worms its way to the surface, refusing to be drowned.

The people in the hall—the guests, the servants, the attendants—move strangely. They have not been crafted from the same eloquent perfection that she has, they are a background to this fanciful dream. Not crafted with the same meticulous care, plastic flora among a great beautiful rose.

At a glance, they are as they have always been: laughing, conversing, raising their goblets in toast. But when you stray from the roses or hold your breath just a little too long. When you truly look, you notice the way their movements stutter, like marionettes just slightly out of

sync. The way their laughter rises and falls in perfect intervals, never truly fading, never truly ceasing. When they wander too far from Don Quixote's gaze, they are drawn back, subtly yet inevitably, as if guided by invisible strings.

They blink at odd intervals—precisely the same amount of time between each breath, each sip of wine. Almost as though they are performing the act of existing rather than simply living. Almost as though they want you to see it.

And the roses—

They are everywhere. Held in hands, tucked into pockets, woven into hair. An excess of them, spilling from arms and sleeves and lapels, carried in abundance, as if they are the only thing that matters.

Roses everywhere. They are spreading them on purpose, under the guise of reverence they plant them adorning them across the dark corners.

Perhaps a moment away would be wise. Just a brief respite. Just a little break to clear your head.

You rise abruptly, the scrape of your chair loud against the marble. Your goblet nearly topples, its wine sloshing against the rim, a deep crimson stain blooming across the tablecloth like an open wound.

The hall falls silent.

The laughter fades.

Eyes turn to you.

Don Quixote's gaze lifts to meet yours.

She does not stand, does not move from her seat at the head of the table. One hand rests lightly against the stem of her goblet, the other twirls a rose lazily between her fingers.

"Thou art leaving so soon?"

Your throat tightens. The phantom taste of petals lingers on your tongue.

"I need some air," you manage.

Her smile is slow, unfurling.

"But thou art already surrounded by the finest of airs," she says, voice warm as sunlight. "Perfumed with the bounty of our garden. Is it not delightful? So fragrant, so full of life?"

You take a step back.

Her smile does not waver.

"Surely thou dost not intend to part ways with us so soon? The day is still young, and the feast—" She gestures languidly to the table, to the platters of food, the goblets of wine, the faces of your friends turned expectantly toward you. "—hath only just begun."

Your head is spinning. The air is too thick. The scent is too strong. The walls seem closer, the roses creeping forward, curling around chair legs, brushing against the hems of dresses, the cuffs of suits.

A moment... just a moment.

A moment to yourself, thats what you need. Thats it, thats all.

You turn—

And the doors are gone.

The grand dining hall stretches endlessly before you, its gilded walls winding into infinity, the table continuing beyond sight.

A single petal drifts lazily before your eyes, spiraling down—down—

"Where dost thou intend to go?"

Her voice is softer now, closer.

Fingers brush against your wrist, light as silk.

Vines coil around your ankles.

Her smile is gentle.

Loving.

"Thou art already home," she whispers, tucking a rose behind your ear.

It is not new revelation. It has always been home, hasn't it? It may have not been your first home.

But it blooms all the same.

"Perhaps you can recall to me another one of thy tales," she says, just as she always does. "Thee art always at ease when thou speak of such things."

Her voice drips into your ears like a liquid, warm and rich, sinking into the hollows of your thoughts. You feel her behind you, close enough that the scent of her—roses, fresh earth, something sweet and thick enough to smother—coils around your lungs, making it hard to breathe. She has always asked this of you. You have always obeyed.

Of course you have.

“Of heroes and justice,” she reminds you gently, as if you could have forgotten. “Of yon great City, where Fixers dost shield the meek. Where the strong take up the mantle of humanity, and the weak find salvation.”

Your lips part. Words try to form, slipping through your fingers like water. But something is wrong.

It’s happening again.

Too close. She is too close.

The world bends at the edges, like sunlight refracting through water, warping into something brighter, softer, perfect. The light grows too sharp, the air too thick, the distant hum of the garden swelling to a deafening symphony.

Every color is richer, every sound an echo of something you do not remember hearing before, a melody on the verge of consuming you whole. It is the same as the roses—the way they spread through your thoughts, the way they make you forget what was real and what was dream.

Except hers is worse.

Hers is stronger.

It pours over you like an overdose, a flood, drowning you before you can even struggle.

You shouldn’t be this close. You know you shouldn’t. But it’s too late. The story is already unfolding on your tongue, whether you willed it

to or not.

Panic sets in. You don't even realize what you've done until after it's already happened. Your body moves before your mind catches up, pushing past her, shoving through the first door you can find, stumbling into the unknown.

The moment you cross the threshold, the air changes. The suffocating perfume of roses is momentarily overpowered by the thick, oily scent of melted butter and searing meat, the sharp tang of metal from freshly polished knives. The clamor of the kitchen washes over you—pots clattering, flames crackling, the rhythmic chop of steel against wood.

You barely notice it.

Your hands move, shaking, feverish, reaching up to your ear. You seize the rose tucked there, fingers grasping the silken petals, the thorned stem. You grip it too tightly, ignoring the sharp sting as the barbs sink into your flesh, the warmth of your own blood trickling down your wrist.

It has to go.

You rip it free, severing it from where it had nestled against your skin. The petals crumple in your fist, crushed to ruin, but instead of soft, pulpy remains, something else spills between your fingers.

A fine, shimmering powder.

Pollen.

It drifts lazily into the air, a golden cloud dispersing into the dim light. And the moment you inhale, the moment it reaches your lungs —

Euphoria.

A heady, all-consuming bliss floods your senses, tingling at the base of your spine, flooding your veins with warmth. Every nerve in your body ignites, tingling with unnatural pleasure, with the kind of rapture that sends your thoughts spiraling into oblivion.

No. No, no, no.

The roses are inside you. They've burrowed into the marrow of your

bones, crept into the recesses of your mind, taken root where they have no right to be. They are choking you, twisting their thorned vines around every inch of your being, and no matter how much you claw at your skin, how much you try to scrape them out, they are still there.

They must go.

They must all go.

The kitchen has gone silent. The servants have stopped moving. Their gazes are distant, unfocused, as if caught in a trance, as if they do not even see you. Their hands continue their motions—kneading dough, stirring pots, sharpening knives.

Your fingers tighten around the handle of a knife.

The first cut is exhilarating.

The silver edge slices cleanly through the nearest vine, severing it in a single motion. A thick, dark liquid spills from the wound—sap? Water? You don't care. It smells of rot, of something long overripe, of sweetness gone sour. It pools at your feet in sluggish rivulets, seeping into the cracks of the floorboards, and your stomach twists.

Voices.

You spin, blade raised, but there is nothing. The kitchen is gone, you find yourself within an abandoned, dilapidated room.

You do not stop.

The vines must go. The petals must go. You hack at them, tearing them from the walls, from the floor, from the ceiling. They twist and writhe beneath your touch, as though in pain, as though alive. The thorns sink into your skin, carving deep gashes into your palms, but the pain is distant, irrelevant.

Blood stains your hands, mingling with the sticky floral ichor, and for the first time in what feels like eternity, you feel something real.

But they keep growing back.

You see them slithering, inching toward their severed brethren, pulsing, twitching, seeking. You cut them again. And again. And again.

A laugh.

Light, airy, delighted.

It takes you too long to realize it is your own.

By the time you stop, the kitchen is unrecognizable. The floor is littered with the remnants of your carnage, a battlefield of shredded petals and bleeding vines. The walls, once draped in verdant splendor, now stand bare, raw, exposed.

And yet—

The moment you pause, the moment your fingers loosen around the knife's handle, you hear it.

A whisper.

Soft. Insidious.

The slithering of vines creeping closer.

Growing and molding, soft earth and muscle being pushed aside as those daemonic impersonators take their unearned place among the living.

The delicate rustle of petals drifting down from the ceiling, landing weightless upon your shoulders.

The sickening creak of roses forcing their way through the cracks in the walls, weaving through the floorboards, curling around your ankles.

That was last week.. month....? No no, yesterday. It had to be. Your journal says so at the top of the page.

It's □□□□□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□.

You wake again, the same bed, the same room.

Something is coiled around your wrist, that is already to be expected.

You look up to see what it is.

□□□□□□□□□.

You do not scream. You do not hesitate.

You simply cut.

The blade slices through the □□□□□□□□ with frantic, desperate strokes, hacking, carving, slashing, until the sheets are ruined with more of your own blood than □□□□. Your own breath comes in ragged gasps, heart hammering against your ribs, vision blurred from exhaustion.

But no matter how much you cut, no matter how much you bleed—

The roses always return.

And the manor—

The manor is □□□□□.

Once, the grand halls gleamed with the warmth of candlelight, rich draperies, and polished wood. Now, they stand in eerie silence, stripped bare of their former splendor.

The furniture, once opulent, lies shattered, reduced to □□□□□ □□□□. Chandeliers dangle like skeletal remains, their rusted chains swaying, their crystals shattered into jagged shards. The paintings that once held vibrant portraits now twist and distort, their subjects' faces melting into □□□ □□□□□ □□□□ that shift when you aren't looking.

It's worse than when you first arrived.

The guests are gone. The servants, frozen mid-motion, stare blankly at nothing, their glassy eyes reflecting only the void.

Your friends—

Your friends are not here. You know that now. And yet, their voices linger, their faces appear in the flickering candlelight, familiar, smiling, real.

But the illusion is breaking. The truth claws its way back to the surface.

Through the ruin, through the bloodied petals that pile high in the corners, through the distant shuffling of something that should not be moving—she stands.

□□ Quixote.

Untouched. Unchanged. As radiant as the day you met her.

She must be real. She must be.

But you—

You are dying.

□□□□□□□□□□ fleeting □□□□□ clarity, slipping between the feverish haze consuming your thoughts. A gnawing, writhing truth buried beneath the delusion, □□□□□□ rot festering inside your mind.

The roses. Their pollen clings to your breath, your skin, your lungs. It distorts your senses, warps your perception, drowning you in the same fever dream that has claimed everyone else.

It's inside you. □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□.

It has been inside you since the day she took you in.

You tried to resist. You cut the roses from your room. You held your breath when the golden dust clouded the air. You forced yourself to see past the dream.

And now, reality peels itself open before you like torn flesh.

The grand tapestries have withered into pulsing, bloated masses of □□□ □□□, veins bulging beneath stretched, translucent skin. The walls drip with □□□□□□□□□□□□. The chandeliers no longer hold crystal but clusters of jagged thorns, □□□□□□□□□. The air □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□.

A violent cough racks your body. Something thick and wet forces its way up your throat. You double over, fingers clawing at your lips as petals spill out—crimson, pink, white—drenched in blood, sticking to your chin, your hands. The taste of iron floods your mouth. The petals twitch where they fall, dissolving into the mass of writhing vines overtaking the floor.

□□□□□□□□□□□□□.

Your skin itches. No—burns. It burns so terribly, an unbearable sensation crawling beneath your flesh.

With shaking hands, you roll up your sleeves—□□□□□□

□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□.

And nearly scream.

Beneath your skin, winding around your veins like parasites, the vines have taken root.

Thin, spindly thorns press against the inside of your flesh, shifting with each pulse of your heart, stretching, growing, feeding. They writhe when you move. They respond. They □□□□□□□□□ you.

Fingers □□□□□□ □□□ stained. You wiped your hands clean, you know you did. But the scent lingers. The stain deepens. When did your nails turn to thorns? It hurts, it hurt hurts hurts...

Why?

It's spreading. The ache is in your ribs now, □□□□□□□□□ pushing, □□□□□ splitting, making room. You'll be more beautiful soon. She'll have to notice you then.

Blooming too far. The petals are inside, underneath. Under your skin. How far do they have to go? □□□□□□□□□? She'll see you soon, won't she?

Your gaze lifts, trembling, to the ruined halls. The corpses shuffle in slow, aimless movements, their bodies contorted, broken, consumed. Faces □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□ roses blooming from hollowed-out skulls, □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□.

You call out. You scream to the □□□□□□□□□.

It Hurts to Grow.

You didn't ask for this.

You didn't want this.

The gardener never warned you.

She just smiled. Smiled as she turned your insides into leaves and mulch.

No answer.

She approaches with slow, deliberate steps. Heels clicking softly against the marble, now lost beneath layers of petals, ruin, you. She does not hurry. There is no need. You will listen.

□□□

Because what else is there?

The petals pile at your feet, whispering the truth you cannot bear to face. □□□□□□□□□. □□□□□□.

She cradles you, swaying gently, humming a lullaby you do not recognize but feel as though you should.

“Thou art tired,” she whispers. A kiss, feather-light, at the corner of your lips. “Aye, weary, lost… But I shall guide thee, □□□□□□□□□.”

Her hands trace along your back, warm, grounding. □□□□□□□□□. The vines tighten, curling around your legs, embracing you, urging you to stay.

Her fingers press against your lips, parting them with careful reverence. In her palm, a single rose rests. Its petals tremble, golden pollen dusting the air.

“Come,” □□□□□□□□□□□□, pressing it to your lips. “Breathe deep, beloved. Let the world fade. Let the garden embrace thee once more.”

The scent overwhelms you. Sweet, heady, intoxicating. It fills your lungs, clouds your mind, drapes over your thoughts like silk.

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□□□?

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You throw yourself into her service with renewed fervor, desperate to drown in the warmth of her voice, the weight of her touch, the certainty she offers.

The moment she enters a room, you kneel at her feet, hands clasped, breath held, awaiting her command as if the very air in your lungs depends on it. You watch her movements with rapt attention, memorizing every delicate gesture, every tilt of her head, every flicker of expression that might hint at her desires before they are spoken.

You cling to her words like scripture, let them anchor you against the creeping unease gnawing at the edges of your mind, whispering things you refuse to hear.

One of them. The roses are happy. They are bright and full and loved.

She smiles when she sees you, ever pleased, ever gracious. A queen upon her throne, magnanimous in her love.

She strokes your hair, her fingers ghosting along your scalp, and calls you by names that turn your insides to honey—soft, warm, slow-dripping sweetness. You preen under her praise, bask in her touch, let yourself melt beneath her hands.

And for a time, it is enough. For a time, the haze of the pollen smothers the thoughts that should not be there, should not be clawing their way back into your head.

But the clarity you once tasted refuses to be forgotten.

At the grand dining table, you stand beside her, hands folded neatly at your front as you serve her with all the devotion of a knight to their sovereign. Each movement is reverent, each action precise. You lay delicate portions onto her plate, humming a soft tune as you pour her goblet full of dark, glistening wine. The air is thick with the fragrance of roses, rich and cloying, almost enough to mask the underlying scent of decay.

And then you serve yourself—the same food, the same drink, the same blessings she bestows upon her beloved.

The first bite reaches your lips, and the illusion wavers.

The soft bread crumbles in your mouth, but it is not bread—it is dry, brittle vines, the kind that curl through the broken ribs of the corpses that shuffle through the manor halls.

The tender meat, so succulent, so rich in its juices, is not meat at all but something gnarled, something that once thrashed and screamed.

The wine is thick, heavier than it should be, and as it pools on your tongue, the taste is unmistakable—copper and salt, raw viscera masquerading as luxury.

Your stomach lurches. You barely manage to swallow before bile rises in your throat.

The room flickers. The warm candlelight shifts to something dim and sickly, the golden glow decaying into a greenish pallor.

The silk tablecloth, once pristine, is damp now—stained, rotting, crawling with things that skitter and writhe. The chair beneath you groans, its legs sinking slightly as if something beneath it stirs. You do not want to look. You do not want to see them, the shadows creeping up, up, up—

The figures around you, her loyal retainers, the guests that once filled the halls with laughter, are slumped over their plates, unmoving. Heads bowed. Roses bloom from the hollows of their faces, petals unfolding where eyes should be.

A hand cups your cheek, warm, grounding. When did she—?

"Shhh," Don coos, tilting your face toward hers before you can look

any longer. Her lips brush against yours, fleeting, just enough to taste the honeyed words that follow. "Thine mind wanders. Thee hath naught to fear. Eat, drink, be merry."

You want to believe her. You need to believe her.

So you nod, and you force yourself to take another bite, another sip, ignoring the way the texture lingers on your tongue, the way the illusion flickers and tears at its seams. But your body knows, even as your mind fights to deny it. The time spent outside of her grasp, beyond the pollen's embrace, has done something to you.

It is no longer as sweet. It is no longer enough.

So you cling to her.

She sees. Just for a moment, her eyes pass over you. A flicker of recognition, a ghost of a smile. The roses shiver with delight. You do, too.

You press yourself closer whenever she is near, seeking the press of her hands, the heat of her breath, the reassurance of her touch. You curl against her side when she reads to you now, your head resting in her lap, fingers laced with hers.

You trail behind her like a shadow, kneeling at her feet without hesitation when she beckons. When she hums her lullabies, you bury yourself against her throat, inhaling deep, desperate to fill your lungs with the pollen she offers you.

And she indulges you. Oh, how she indulges you.

Her hands trace your shoulders, your spine, pressing firmly, soothing the tremors in your limbs. She cradles your face between her palms, kissing your brow, your cheeks, your lips. She does not question the way you shake beneath her fingertips, nor the way you grasp at her as if she might vanish should you loosen your hold.

Please. She tends to the most beautiful ones. You must be more beautiful. You must be perfect. If she does not touch you, you will wither. You cannot wither, there is so much left to do. So you must offer every part, your thorns, your petals, your stem, your roots. All of it, all of it till there is nothing left.

"Shhh, mine servant," she murmurs against your lips, her breath warm, intoxicating. "Thy heart pounds so. Hath thee forgotten? I t'will

not leave thee."

You nod quickly, gasping as her lips meet yours fully this time, deeper, claiming. You let her press you back into the velvet cushions of her throne, let her fingers tangle in your hair, her whispers melt into your skin. You let her steal the air from your lungs, let her fill you with her warmth, her touch, her scent.

Because as long as you are here, beneath her, within her embrace, there is only the garden. There is only her love.

And there is nothing else.

There cannot be anything else.

But at the corner of your eye, just beneath her collar, something moves. A small, thorny vine, slithering slow, curling in upon itself like a serpent.

You flinch.

It's small—barely a twitch—but she sees it. Her eyes narrow just slightly. For a moment, just a moment, the warmth in them dims, like a candle guttering against an unseen breeze.

Then, as if it never happened, she smiles.

"Thou art shaken," she hums, thumb tracing slow circles against your cheek. "Hath I not been gentle?"

You shake your head quickly, swallowing hard. "No—mine lord, I—"

She hushes you with a single finger to your lips. "Worry not. I would never bring thee harm. Never."

Her hand lingers, and the sensation beneath her touch does not fade. It pulses, slow, rhythmic—not quite the beat of a heart, not quite the shifting of muscle beneath skin. It is something other, something restless. Something that knows you are noticing.

Bleeding leaves. There's blood on the roses. But they don't care. They're still perfect. They're still hers. You can't remember if you were ever perfect.

You lean into her palm despite it. You must.

If you recoil, if you acknowledge it, if you let yourself think too much, the veil will slip further. The walls will rot before your very eyes, the corpses will groan from the depths of the manor, the wine will sour on your tongue, and she—she—

She will not be Don Quixote anymore.

So you bury yourself in her presence, in the illusion, in her.

You kneel at her feet as she lounges upon her throne of roses, pressing reverent kisses to the tops of her shoes. You rest your head upon her lap in the golden light of midday, let her fingers glide through your hair, let the sound of her voice lull you to a world where everything is fine. Where it is always fine.

To be more like them. The roses are lovely. The roses are perfect. If you were more like them, she would see you. She would love you, the same as she does them.

But the more time you spend at her side, the more you notice.

She does not breathe unless she remembers to.

Her chest does not rise and fall with the quiet rhythm of life—not unless you are watching. And when she does remember, it is shallow, mechanical, like the mockery of something that once knew how. Like something wearing the motions of humanity, an actor performing a role long after forgetting the meaning behind its lines.

Her speech—

Sometimes, you cannot understand it.

The words twist and shift, slipping from her lips in a cadence that makes your teeth ache, syllables writhing and curling in the air like whispers from something vast.

When she speaks, the edges of her words fray, shattering into echoes that linger long after she has gone silent, stretching and distorting, repeating themselves in warped, off-kilter tones as if the air itself is struggling to contain them.

Tend to me. The others lean toward her when she passes, petals open in quiet worship. You stretch, you reach—why won't she look at you?

You do not believe, you must make her believe.

And when she looks at you—

There are moments when you do not recognize her.

Her face, so familiar, so adored, seems to shift at the edges, like the surface of a pond disturbed by something moving beneath. It presses outward, warping, stretching the features you know into something not quite right. Something close. Too close. As if her form is a mere suggestion, a memory.

And when she laughs—oh, when she laughs—there is not just one voice, but many. A chorus, just slightly out of sync, layered over itself like an audience mimicking her joy, their voices spilling from her throat in eerie, discordant harmony.

And the roses sing. Not in words, but in rustling leaves, in the soft stretch of vines curling toward her hands. You try to join them, but you have no roots nor leaves.

Too red.

Too deep.

The color of something blooming beneath the surface of raw meat, of petals unfurling in the damp hollows of a corpse.

And yet—

She smiles. And this time, this time, it is only for you.

"Aye," she breathes, the word curling around you like a lullaby.

"Thou art beautiful."

But you need to be sure.

You need to see.

If you can just confirm it with your own eyes—if you can find proof, some evidence, some small fragment of truth—you can reassure yourself.

You can take comfort in knowing that she is at least something resembling a human.

Because if she isn't—

Then what does that make you?

And so one day you wait.

It is agonizing, listening to the quiet. The only sound is the steady, rhythmic tick of the grand clock outside your door, each chime feeling almost tangible. You sit in the dark, unmoving, barely breathing, your pulse loud in your ears. The air in your chamber is thick, stagnant, carrying the faint scent of roses—always roses.

Then, at last, she dismisses you for the evening.

You bow as you always do, murmuring the same pleasantries, the same words she expects. And then you retreat to your chamber, shutting the door behind you, the same obedience you have shown for so long.

But you do not sleep.

Instead, you stand by your door, listening. You remain there until your legs ache, until your arms grow weak, until exhaustion gnaws at the edges of your mind.

And you wait.

Hours stretch into eternity. How long has it been? Does she not even sleep anymore? Has she ever? The thought unsettles you. Your breaths grow shallow. Maybe she knows. Maybe she's known all along. Maybe she's waiting just as you are, waiting for you to make a mistake.

Any moment now, she's going to—

Movement.

A shift in the air. The faintest rustle of fabric. The soft tap of her boots against the floor.

And then—

Nothing.

Silence.

Your heart stutters. The absence of footsteps is more alarming than their presence. She has to be moving. You press your ear to the wood,

straining, but there is nothing—nothing but the suffocating quiet.

With painstaking caution, you crack the door open ever so slightly, just enough to see into the hallway, and—

There she is. A vision of elegance, draped in moonlight and shadow. But she is not walking.

The roses carry her.

Thorned vines coil around her legs like a harness, snaking from the floor and curling about her lower half. They lift her, guide her, mimicking the motion of a stride, carrying her across the hall with grace.

As if even using her own legs was something she only did when you were watching.

You step back. Shut the door without a sound.

And wait.

You listen for her departure, for the quiet rustling of the vines slithering away. Only when the air grows still do you release the breath you've been holding.

Your fingers tighten around the handle of your knife, knuckles white, breath shallow.

You know the roses will search for you if they realize you are not in your room. You've seen how they move, how they hunt. Their tendrils slither beneath doors, creep through cracks, whispering against the wood like searching fingers. They are always watching.

But you have seen that they do not bother their own.

Your gaze sweeps the dim corridor, searching—searching—until you see it.

A corpse.

One of the shambling things that wander the halls, its body barely intact. The roses hold it together, bloom from its rotted flesh, weave through the spaces where organs once were. It sways slightly, as if breathing, though you know there is no life left in it.

Disgust coils in your stomach, but you force yourself to move.

Your hands tremble as you reach out. The vines wrapped around its chest pulse beneath your fingers, slick and warm. The moment you make contact, the corpse stirs.

Its jaw creaks open.

It does not speak—not in any voice that belongs to it.

A whisper slithers from its throat, layered voices speaking over one another, distant and fragmented.

“□□□

But even they are changing.

The dresser is half-swallowed, its wooden drawers cracked, leaking thick, amber sap. The mirror remains whole, but its reflection—

The glass ripples, distorts. The edges are laced with thorns, shifting when you try to focus, showing glimpses of something that should not be there.

And the bed—

It has fused with the floor. The headboard is no longer wood but a tangle of branches and petals, woven into something intricate and grotesque.

She stands before the mirror.

Her hands move with slow precision, brushing the buttons of her coat. One by one, she undoes them. The fabric pools around her elbows, slipping down her arms, slow as falling petals.

And beneath—

It shifts, pulses, breathes beneath her skin.

Where flesh should be, where bone and muscle should lay beneath that noble frame, there is movement.

A thousand tiny motions, a thousand twisting things, shifting like petals caught in a slow, unfurling bloom. Beneath the surface, you see the undulations, the curling and tightening of unseen shapes—roots burrowing deep, vines coiling. Something that is not her.

Or maybe it is. Maybe this is what she has always been. Maybe this is what she was meant to be.

She sighs, her shoulders rolling back, her spine stretching too fluidly, too naturally—like a reed bending in the wind, like something that no longer cares to mimic the stiffness of humanity. A breathless, contented sound, soft and pleased, as if her body shifting like this—reshaping, unfurling—is nothing more than a lazy morning stretch.

They stretch and shift, twining over her ribs, snaking across the inside of her throat where a pulse should be, tightening and loosening in slow continuous motions. Something deep within her is alive in ways no human should be.

Beneath the crawling latticework of vines and roses, there are still traces of what she used to be. Patches of bare skin, stretched too tight over shifting muscle, remain in places—along her collarbone, the curve of her waist, the inside of her wrist. They are bruised and pallid, marred by the telltale pressure of something growing beneath, as if her body itself is struggling to contain the bloom.

Her fingers trail absently over a section where flesh still clings to her ribs, where the vines have yet to fully claim her. When she presses, the skin dimples, the way real flesh should. The way something living, something human, does.

Her fingers wander further, pressing lightly against her sternum—against the writhing mass where a heartbeat should be.

She hums to herself—a quiet, thoughtful tune. A song of knights and valor, of glories won and battles fought. But here, in this moment, it sounds different.

A vine shifts, winding further around her ribs, stretching toward her throat before curling back into place. The roses that bloom along her chest swell with the movement, petals trembling as though caught in a breeze.

She exhales again, voice thick with something reverent, something almost worshipful. “Ah…”

“You flourish so,” she murmurs, thumb brushing over a cluster of smaller vines nestled beneath the larger ones. “With such devotion, such purpose.”

Her head tilts, golden curls spilling over her shoulder, roses woven between the strands like a crown, like an offering. A petal drifts from her collarbone, curling as it falls, dissolving the moment it touches the floor.

“Do you not adore me?” she asks, voice thick with quiet reverence. “Do you not love me?”

A vine moves.

Not idly, not shifting from her breath or the natural motion of her body—but in response.

It curls around her wrist, winding up her arm. Sentient.

Don smiles. Soft and sweet.

She lifts her hand to cup her own cheek, fingers brushing against skin —against the last remnants of her mortality, where the vines have not yet claimed her. Her eyes flutter shut, her breath leaving her in a slow, pleased hum.

"Mine faithful," she sighs, voice dripping with devotion, with warmth. "Thou hast given thyself to me so freely. So willingly. How could I not cherish thee so?"

A sharp, searing pain lances through your wrist.

You jolt, barely stifling a gasp.

The roses.

The ones you tore from the corpse. The ones you draped over yourself.

You hadn't noticed—hadn't felt—how they had begun to move.

How their stems had started to burrow.

Thin, hairlike thorns press into your skin, burrowing, seeking. They wind around your arm, threading beneath the collar of your shirt, creeping like veins desperate to root themselves within you.

Your pulse hammers, each beat a countdown. You bite down hard on your tongue, the sharp sting grounding you, keeping the scream locked in your throat. But the vines are insidious. They tighten, sinking deeper, their petals shuddering against your flesh as if tasting you.

A breathless whimper escapes before you can swallow it down as you try to rip it out of your arm.

The moment it leaves your lips, you know your mistake.

For as you turn you see those red eyes, locked to yours.

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Chapter 4: Filament

Chapter Summary

> The fever wails, the fever rejoices. It kisses my bones, it swaddles my skin, it whispers lullabies in a tongue only the beloved may know.
>
> "Pluck me, pluck me, pluck me!" They sing aloud, dancing and prancing.
>
> "The fruit is bursting, the rind is soft, the skin is splitting with love, with rotting life."

Chapter Notes

> Hihi join the disc hehe
>
> https://discord.gg/GPBNYYxExz

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Don’s head snaps toward the door, the motion so sharp, so sudden, that for a moment, it seems has half the mind to kill you with her gaze alone. Her crimson eyes, glowing with an eerie, feverish light, narrow to slits—pupils shrinking into sharp pinpricks as she sees your form in the dark.

Her lips curl, the edges twitching—not in a grin, not in that familiar expression of whimsy and grandeur—but in disdain for whoever would dare intrude on her.

"Who lurks in the veil of shadows?!"

Her voice is a snarl, unhinged, something almost feral. It echoes through the ruined halls, bouncing off the rose-covered walls, slithering through the vines like blood through veins.

You try to move, to retreat into the darkness, feet dragging for

purchase against the floor.

But you simply cannot outpace her.

The room comes alive.

The floor convulses beneath you, thick tendrils bursting from the ground like snapping jaws. They lash out—wrapping around your legs, coiling around your waist, wrenching you forward with a force that threatens to tear you in half should you find anything to hold onto. The thorns scrape along your skin, digging deep, sinking into muscle like tiny, eager teeth.

You choke back a cry as you are dragged across the threshold of the room.

This is it.

This is the end.

Surely, she will kill you for your impudence, for daring to spy on her within the peace of her chamber. You doubt you would even get the time to try and defend yourself.

But then—

She sees that it's you.

And the rage—so blistering, so unrelenting in the previous moment. It's gone.

Her breath hitches. The suspicion bleeds from her expression like ink spreading through water. Her mouth parts, lips trembling around a breath that never fully forms. Her eyes, still wide, still wild, fall upon the roses.

The ones burrowing into your flesh, having finally taken hold and blooming into you as they have her for centuries.

For a moment, there is nothing.

No sound. No movement. Even the vines seem to still, their writhing halting in eerie silence. The only thing that moves is the rise and fall of her chest, the slight quiver of her fingers, hovering, trembling—reaching.

The vines that had seized you, that had dragged you forward,

suddenly slacken. They unfurl like gentle fingers retreating, but that's not enough for her. She yanks them, tears them off you with her own strength.

And then—

She is upon you.

Her hands seize your shoulders, her grip unyielding and desperate. She pulls you close, crushing you against her with a force that steals the air from your lungs.

"Ah—" Her breath quivers against your cheek. "Mine beloved..."

Her voice is trembling.

Not with fear or with anger, it is exultant. Something that borders on worship in her tone.

She presses against you, her fingers grasping, clawing, as though trying to mold you into her own form, as though trying to reshape you so that you fit against her.

"I hath waited—" she gasps, the words spilling from her lips in a fevered rush. "Oh, how I hath waited!"

She leans back just enough to look at you, her smile stretched unnaturally wide in its sheer, manic joy.

"For thee to see! For thee to understand!" She laughs, breathless and delirious, her hands skimming reverently over the places where the roses have rooted into you. "This world—it is naught but illusion, is it not? A wretched, crumbling farce woven of falsehoods and decay! One I hath suffered alone, stewing within mine own consciousness since a time I can naught recall!" Her breath stutters, her voice shattering into something near-hysterical. "B-but now thee art with me too, thee hast taken the infection upon thyself—that thee may relieve me of this suffering silence?!"

Her hands trace the vines where they have dug into your flesh, her fingertips ghosting over the petals that bloom from your skin. And then—

She giggles.

A high, rapturous thing, a sound teetering on the edge of madness.

Her lips part in a giddy grin, teeth gleaming between them like a glint of a dagger.

"They hath chosen thee," she whispers, pressing closer, her breath cool against your fevered skin. "Mine roses. They hath opened thine eyes, at long last. I hath spoken, pleaded night after night after night."

Her body shakes against you, her fingers tangling into your hair, her forehead pressing hard against yours. She is shaking, trembling with overwhelming, all-consuming emotion, and it is too much.

"Dost thou hear them now, beloved?"

Her voice drops into something hushed, as if she doesn't want them to hear.

"Their whispers, their adorations?"

Her grip tightens—

Her fingers twitch against your scalp, pressing your ear so close its like she's trying to weave the words into your brain.

"Speak!" she commands, the word breaking from her lips in something between a plea and a demand. "Speak! Tell me thou hearest them! Tell me thou knowest I am right! That these delusions of grandeur are not mine alone to bear!"

But—

You hear nothing.

Nothing but your own ragged breathing, each inhale a jagged, scraping thing, clawing its way down your throat as though the very air has turned to thorns.

Nothing but the frantic, uneven pounding of your heart, hammering against your ribs like it wants out.

Nothing but the roses—pulsing, twitching, breathing against your skin, against your bones, winding deeper and deeper, burrowing into the spaces where you once existed.

Despite all of the insanity, all the twisted, blooming unreality that coils around you like a lover’s embrace, you still cannot hear them.

But she can.

And her gaze—

Her gaze pleads with you, wide and glistening, trembling with desperation so raw, so earnest it is unbearable. She is searching you, reaching, grasping, begging for something to hold onto, for something real, for something that will not slip between her fingers like all else before.

Waiting for you to confirm her delusions.

Waiting for you to love them, just as she has.

Waiting for you to fall into that wonderful shower of damp petals.

"I… I hear them."

Those words tumble from your lips like stolen breath, like something not yours, something placed within you—something planted.

The roots of them dig deep, curling around your tongue, unfurling in the warm darkness of your mouth. They do not belong to you, and yet, they procreate there all the same.

But they are enough.

And Don couldn't be happier.

A sound wrenches free from her throat, something caught between a sob, a whimper, a laugh. Or perhaps all three. Or none. A sound undone, stripped of its meaning, swallowed and regurgitated by the roses, echoing with too much. A thing that has forgotten how to be anything but this.

She clutches you, clings to you with a force that threatens to consume. As though you are the last ember in a world suffocating beneath its own decay. As though you are her proof, her tether, her salvation. As though she cannot survive without.

And the laughter.

Not the bright, boisterous laugh of the Don you once knew, not the exuberant, theatrical trill of a girl who once dreamed of heroism, who sat before you wishing for stories.

It is gasping bursts of air, shaking her frame, trembling at the edges like a candle guttering in the wind. It is giddy, breathless breaking. Warbling in pitch like a songbird with its throat slit open. Her fingers

twitch, nails biting into your skin, twitching with the same feverish hunger as the roses that have burrowed into your flesh.

"Ah—!" She gasps, and it is full of wonder, full of devotion, full of something too vast to be contained within her. "Thou hearest them. At long, long last—!"

Her fingers spasm against you, hot and slick, trembling in place. Her eyes shine, wet and wide, staring into yours as though she is starving for the sight of you, as though she could drink you in, drowning herself in the divinity of your existence.

"Ohhh, mine dearest, mine love—"

She quakes in your arms, convulsing with pure, unbridled rapture, trembling with a love so vast, so boundless.

She presses closer, her whole body thrumming with barely contained ecstasy.

"Ahaha—aha—! "

Her hands are on you—gripping, grasping, fingers tangled in your hair, slick with sap, with sweat, with something that has no name.

On the undersides of her palms—

A forest. A world. A heartbeat of roses carved into flesh, petals twisting like veins beneath her skin, seeping into her bloodstream.

"O mother, O womb, O garden of plenty—thy roots stretch ever outward, ever inward, threading through rib and vein, knitting me anew. I thank thee for this blessing."

Who is she speaking to? You do not know, for you are the only people in the room.

"How glorious!" she breathes, and her grip tightens—her forehead presses against yours so hard it hurts, but she does not relent. "How divine! Oh, how long I hath waited, how long I hath yearned! To share in this splendor with another!"

"Ah... dost thou feel it?" she murmurs, voice hushed, reverent. "They sing for thee. They welcome thee. Oh, beloved, they adore thee as I do!"

The vines reach out and they pull at the corners of your lips, insisting

on a nice big smile.

And Don smiles back.

She shines, brighter than the sun itself, her giddiness spilling over into frantic, feverish kisses against your cheeks, your brow, your lips.

"Ah, mine beloved—mine darling, darling heart." she sighs, rocking you against her, voice lilting and affectionate. "Thou shalt never be alone—never. I shall cherish thee, protect thee, love thee, as no other ever could."

Then suddenly, she lunges.

You barely have time to react before she shoves you back, knees catching at the foot of the bed.

Your balance breaks and the world starts tilting. You stick your arms out, floundering to try and recapture your footing, to not be cast to the thorny surface.

But you do.

You fall, you fall and fall and fall and fall, but you can see it.

The amber dripping fluid raining down, the spoiled sun casting light within the room. The stars eyes embedded within the walls, watching the two of you to continue.

And when you land the bed of roses catches you like an embrace, their velvet petals soft, their thorns are not.

Pain lances through you the moment your body makes contact. The thorns bite—sharp and cruel in their precision. A thousand tiny daggers prick into your back, your arms, your legs. The pain is not a scream but a whisper, slow and insidious, sinking its hooks into your nerves as they fuse to you.

You jolt, body tensing, breath hitching, but the sound dies before it can leave your lips.

Because she follows, taking a couple tentative steps forward as she begins to remove the layers of her dress. The vines assisting in removing her cravat and shoes, as well as her large overcoat, leaving her in just the partially unbuttoned dress shirt and pants.

Don Quixote slowly lowers herself to the bed, her silhouette framed by

writhing roses. The fever-bright gleam in her eyes has consumed her now, swallowed her whole, burning with something beyond reason—beyond sanity. Her lips part in a breathless sigh, not even baring a glance—a breath as she climbs her way across the thorny sheets, ignoring the spikes that tear her clothes, leaving her knees bloody.

She stares at you as if she has never seen anything so holy.

As if the mere sight of you sprawled upon her altar of thorns is enough to bring her to the brink of ecstasy.

Her hands twitch at her sides before she straddles your waist, gingerly picking up the vines surrounding you. With slow, deliberate care, she gathers them closer, pulling the living tendrils toward you with reverence, as if offering a sacred gift.

They tie you down firmly, winding tighter and tighter as they restrain you to the bed.

"O martyr of mine heart," she breathes, voice thick. "Thou art bound—thine flesh to mine, thine soul entwined. No more separation, no more distance—only thee and I."

Your body jolts against the bed of roses, the sensation is maddening—a contradiction of pain and something dangerously close to pleasure. The thorns do not simply pierce; they trace, they press, they linger against your skin, savoring their claim.

"O child, O beloved, thou art made of mine own making. Thou art blood and bough, thorn and womb."

You shift, instinctively testing the hold of the vines, but they answer by tightening. The moment hesitation flickers through you, they punish.

A sharp sting flares along your wrist.

A shallow cut blooms open, warm and wet.

Her breath shudders upon the sight of the freshly drawn liquid.

Don Quixote moves slowly, deliberately, her fingers trailing over the cut, smearing red across your skin in erratic, mindless strokes. Her touch is ungloved, her fingertips pressing into the fresh wounds as though to commit them to memory.

She hums—soft, trembling, blissful.

"Red, tis such an alluring color is it not?" she sighs, voice that of hushed delirium. "Dost thou not see it? The roses breathe thee, the roses drink all that thee offer?"

Her thumb presses against the curve of your jaw, tilting your head, her eyes drinking in every cut, every thorn that has kissed you.

You watch as her gaze drifts to your lower body, slowly and lazily. Tracking every contour, with patience and endearing love.

She leans all the way down, one hand dragging down from your face, over your chest and across your stomach. Until she finally cups a hand between your legs, starting to move her hand in a slow circular motion.

"Haah... Gnnnh!"

"Ours is a world of roots and marrow, of breathless hymns and gasping praise." She says, all the while her hand never stops moving. Rubbing you slowly but firmly with her open palm, the heat between your legs increasing as she does.

"To be hollowed is to be filled, to be undone and done again." Trying to understand her words was hard enough as is, but her free hand finds its way between a gap in your shirt. Smoothing over skin gently, followed by her tearing open your shirt.

With a new canvas bared to her lowers her face to it, licking and kissing the vast expanse, smearing your skin in lipstick.

The grasping touch over your crotch as she drags her palm up and down does not relent. Your hips starting to slightly buck, following her, seeking out the pressure where you can find it.

"Mmmmnnnh... haah..."

Her lips press against your cheek—soft, fleeting, loving. Before moving down to your shoulder, her breath hot and wet as it exhales across your skin.

To which she only whispers a plea for silence.

"Shhhhhhh."

Pain.

Searing and sharp.

Her teeth sink directly into your shoulder, its a rough and uneven bite that doesn't tear cleanly.

The pain is white-hot, a lance of fire splitting through flesh. The points of her canines dig deep, past skin, past the first bloom of blood, deeper, deeper, until the wound is no mere mark but a missing chunk carved out.

You choke on a gasp, body jerking instinctively, but the vines do not allow retreat. They tighten, contracting around you, forcing you to endure.

Don, aware of your pain, simply does her best to hold you tight, her other hand continuing to play with your lower half as if to distract you. A sound slips from her throat, something between a whimper and a moan, muffled by the flesh caught between her teeth.

She drinks in the moment, her breath warm against your skin as her fingers pick up even more pace, trying to press into you through the fabric.

Her other hand rises from your chest in response to keep you still. It finds one of your limbs, gripping, grasping, smearing the blood between you.

"Shhhhhh... shhhh. Lo, the garden swells, the garden chants, a chorus of petals and breath and bone. The earth hums with fevered prayer, the vines twist in genuflection, the roots writhe in worship," she murmurs against your torn skin, lips brushing the wound as she speaks.

Her tongue flicks over the bite, slow, savoring.

It hurts, it hurts so badly.

But the next sound that comes out of your mouth is not one of pain or anguish, it's a stifled moan as she crawls up further atop your chest. Replacing her hands with her knee, giving you more attention. Her whole leg pushing forward against your sex as she rocks it back and forth.

The wet warmth sends something vile crawling up your spine.

Another choked sound escapes before you can stop it. The sensation

jolts through you like lightning, sending a violent ripple through your body. A shudder as you arch your back from the newly added pleasure.

The way she touches and caresses you, each sensation causing you to tense your body tighter. But the vines coil, slithering up your waist, around your throat, between your thighs, opening you up, pressing you deeper into the altar of roses—bearing you to her in all your honesty.

She does not bite like a lover.

She bites like a zealot desperate for communion, like a devotee seeking rapture.

Her breath is fevered against your skin, ragged as she begins to play with your chest in full. Her grip is trembling but firm, a hand cupping each breast and fondling them. Holding you close, as though afraid you might disappear, dissolve into the unreal.

"Ah—mine saint! Mine sacred wound!" she gasps, voice breaking with sheer, breathless reverence.

"Dost thou feel it?" she pleads, voice wild, frantic as she begins to quicken her ministrations. "The admiration that exists solely for thee?"

Her teeth sink deeper, reopening the wound, but you can't focus on it. Right when you might scream out in pain, her fingers take hold gently and pull, the movement of her bloody knee reaching its peak.

And so with too many sensations rocketing through your body at once you climax underneath her, knees buckling together tightly as they try and fail to wrap around her. Back arching and head thrown back as the vibrant sensation of orgasm, laced with the pain of her bite, the piercing of the thorns. You can do nothing but rock back into her, a wet spot gradually making itself known between your legs.

She exhales, shaky, exultant.

"Ah… together, together, together—mine heart beats with thine."

Lifting from your shoulder, her forehead presses against yours, her voice hushed.

The knee on your lower half comes to a grinding halt. You shudder, instinctively straining forward, trying to chase after the touch she so

cruelly denies. But the vines hold firm, their thorned embrace unyielding. You can only push so far in your restraints.

"Shh," Don soothes, her voice lilting with saccharine affection. "To indulge too much wouldst drive thee to madness… Prithee, a moment longer, mine beloved."

Her words are gentle, but the reverence in them is drowned out.

Her maw opens again, a miasma of blood and saliva dripping down. You could do nothing to stop it, not a single thing confined within whose barbed vines except rub your legs together.

CRUNCH.

It still hurts, every time. The tearing, the rending. The flash of white-hot agony as her teeth sink deep. Muscle, sinew, tendon, flesh—violently sundered. It spills. It gives. It bleeds.

And she takes.

Takes, takes, takes.

But for all she takes, for all that you give her—

She rewards you.

For every ragged wound she inflicts, for every cruel mark she brands into your skin—she kisses you. She touches you. She loves you.

Her devotion is endless. If you were to slip away—if you were to vanish into the void that has always loomed at the edges of her existence—she would never forgive herself.

So she clings to you desperately.

The taste of iron coats her tongue, but she does not shy away. She lingers, she drinks, she presses her lips to the wound with aching tenderness. The contrast is maddening—the unbearable agony of her bite followed by the soft, fleeting brushes of her lips, the way she soothes only to hurt again.

Making new marks and taking more blood, only to lick across them

with long trails of saliva, to bestow upon you pleasure with her fingers and mouth to reward you for being good.

She trembles.

Not in pleasure. Not in sadism.

But in need.

"Ah—!" The sound that spills from her lips is not the triumphant cry of a beast reveling in the suffering of its prey. It is a sob. A broken, breathless whimper that cracks in her throat.

She is lost in you.

Drowning in the sensation.

Worshiping you in the only way she knows how.

"Mine beloved… thou art divine," she gasps, her breath shuddering against your torn skin. Her lips press against the wound she has just made, her tongue flicking out to lap at the fresh blood. "Oh, mercy! Sweet mercy! Wilt thou not accept me? Wilt thou not take me into thee, as I take thee into me?"

Her voice shakes, barely above a whisper, as though the sheer weight of her devotion is suffocating her.

The roses do not stop at you.

The vines lash outward, slithering over her limbs, winding around her waist, pulling her with you. Binding her to you. They twist and weave across her pale skin, caressing her with the same cruel embrace they have bestowed upon you, their thorns pressing deep, deeper, drawing fresh ribbons of crimson.

Yet she welcomes it.

The vines tighten, winding through both of you, intertwining your bodies in a merciless grip. The roses drink from her as they do from you. And still, she does not fight.

"Ah… dost thou see it now?" Her voice is having that same manic devotion. "We art the same, thou and I. This pain—this suffering—it doth belong to us both. Lo, even the roses drink of us. Look."

The bed of roses drinks deeply of the flowing blood from your body,

the same as her. The pooling liquid being absorbed

The colors shift of the bed shift in beautiful, riveting colors.

Blooms of deep scarlet, wine-dark purples, dusky violets, burst forth—lush, overgrown, thriving in the nourishment of your shared blood.

And then she moves back, lifting up one of your legs and rolling you to your side. Eyeing the wet spot between your legs she can't help but feel elated. That in her attempts to love, your body has responded favorably. That it would accept what she has given, that you could allow yourself to be taken in this carnal embrace.

Lowering herself next to you, she juts out her crotch to grind against your own. Placing her arms around your neck to pull you forwards, she continues to grind desperately as if mimicking the act of penetration.

Her teeth sink into you again.

A fresh, searing pain explodes through your body, raw and unbearable, a flare of agony that steals the breath from your lungs. She drinks from you greedily, her lips parting only to return, her tongue running over the wound as though savoring the taste.

And yet—

She whimpers.

"A-Ah…!" Her breath hitches, catching in her throat. When she pulls back—just for a moment, just to look at you—her lips are parted, her eyes glazed, her expression stricken with something horrible even as she humps forwards to meet you.

Remorse.

Guilt.

"Forgive me," she gasps suddenly, the words tumbling from her lips in a breathless rush. "Oh, beloved, forgive me—!"

But then, another bite.

A deeper wound.

Another muffled sob against your skin.

She shudders violently, hands clawing at you, clutching at you as though she can fix what she has done simply by holding you tighter.

"I—I do not mean to—!" she chokes out, her breath a frantic, erratic mess. "But thou art so sweet! So perfect!"

Another kiss. Another press of her lips against the torn flesh, as though the act itself can erase the pain.

Another buck of her hips as she seeks to meld your lower halves together, the grind fabric and force of her hips drawing out more heat from within.

"It hurts thee," she murmurs, stricken, horrified. "O' mercy, it hurts thee I understand."

She kisses you again. And again. A dozen, a hundred times, her lips brushing against your wounds with trembling reverence.

"But I—I cannot stop, I cannot—"

Her breath is ragged. Wild.

"I love thee, I love thee, I love thee—" The words fall from her lips like a frenzied chant, a prayer, a plea. "Wouldst thou curse me for this? Wouldst thou cast me away, condemn me to the void for the simple sin of loving another?"

Her fingers tremble against your jaw as she hooks a thumb inside to pry it open.

Her lips crash against yours.

The taste of blood fills your mouth instantly.

Hot, metallic, intoxicating—thick with the mingling of hers and yours.

She does not kiss with care nor restraint.

No—she kisses with hunger. With fervor. With all the desperation of a starving woman, her breath shaky and erratic, her hands grasping at you as though she means to consume you whole.

The vines, they hold you, just as they hold her too.

You see them coating over her body like a faint corruption. The thorns do not hesitate. They bite. They dig into her skin, piercing deep,

drawing thick rivulets of crimson that trail down her pale flesh like the weeping of the roses.

She does not flinch.

She does not struggle.

She welcomes it.

She craves it.

She takes it for you.

For every thorn that pierces you, another finds its way into her. For every lash that strikes your back, another tears across hers, blooming fresh streaks of red over her skin. She does not shy away from the agony—she leans into it, embraces it, drinks deep of it as though it is a sacrament.

And when she pulls back, just barely—just enough for you to see her face—

She is weeping.

But the tears that fall from her wide, feverish eyes are red.

Dark, crimson streams that streak down her cheeks, trailing along her lips, dripping from her chin.

Her voice trembles, a breathless whisper caught between reverence and desperation.

"Oh… mine beloved, mine saint, mine salvation… why?"

She presses her forehead to yours, her entire body shaking, trembling with something raw and unbearable. Her hands cradle your face, gentle despite the iron grip of the vines. There is no force in her touch —only pleading, only the lingering warmth of devotion seared into her fingertips.

"Why dost thou resist? Why dost thou flee from this blessing? Thou dost not hold me."

Her fingers trail down your jaw, brushing against your throat, ghosting over your pulse. Every touch is tender, reverent—soothing the pain she has inflicted.

"I know it hurteth, my love. I know it woundeth thee… but thou must trust me. The pain is but momentary—fleeting, transient… but what we shall become? What we shall create?"

She exhales, shuddering.

"It shall be beyond us."

The moment your body shifts—just the barest attempt to pull away—

The roses react.

The vines lash out.

A sharp crack splits through the air.

Pain blossoms across your back as the living restraints strike, a vicious, punishing snap of thorns against flesh. The wound splits open where it lands, a fresh rush of pain searing through your nerves.

And Don Quixote—

Her tears fall harder.

Her hands grasp at you, clutching, trembling.

She cries for you.

She cries for the both of you.

"Ah—!" She gasps, pressing her against your temple, hands trying to reach for the fresh welt blooming across your skin. "Prithee, I am sorry..."

Her voice breaks on the words.

Her arms wrap around you, pulling you into her, cradling you against her warmth. Her touch is careful, like she fears shattering you entirely.

"They are angry," she murmurs, her breath shaky, her fingers trailing through your hair with aching gentleness. "But it is okay."

She kisses your brow.

"Let me hold thee."

Her lips brush your cheek.

"Let me love thee."

Her breath ghosts against your lips.

"Let me keep thee."

No matter how you move, how you shift, they pull you back.

She pulls you back.

Your breath is ragged, your body trembling beneath the ceaseless grip of the vines. Every movement, every shuddering breath, only draws the thorns deeper—a cruel reminder of your entanglement. The sharp sting of each puncture burns, the vines responding to your struggle with ruthless precision, ensuring you do not slip away.

The lashes come when you resist.

A sharp crack in the air, a flash of searing pain against your skin. The punishment is swift, automatic, mechanical in its discipline. And yet… it is not as painful as it should be.

For every bite of the thorns, for every cruel snap against your skin—

Half of it never reaches you.

Don takes it.

She moves over top of you again, pressing herself into the punishment meant for you, shielding you from the worst of it. The lashes carve fresh lines into her skin, the vines sinking deep into her flesh, thorns weaving through her body as if they are part of her now.

Yet when you turn to meet her face she smiles.

"Shh… fret not, beloved," she whispers, her voice soft. "I shall bear it with thee. I shall suffer it with thee. For as long as it taketh, until thou art ready… I shall be here."

Her fingers brush against your face, wiping away the sweat, the blood, the lingering remnants of struggle. There is no cruelty in her touch. No forcefulness. Only warmth. Only a desperate, unrelenting need to keep you here.

Her hands drift downward, skimming over your shoulders, your arms,

your chest. Her fingers feather-light, tracing the curve of your ribs, the lines of old wounds and fresh ones alike. There is no hesitation in her touch, no hesitation in the way she maps the places you hurt, in the way she lingers over every mark as though to commit them to memory.

"It need not be painful, dost thou see?" she murmurs, her lips ghosting over your cheek, your jaw, the shell of your ear. Her breath is warm, soothing against the rawness of your skin. "It need not be frightening. I shall ease thee into it—I shall make it gentle… I shall make it beautiful."

The contours of your bodies fit together almost perfectly, arms and legs entwined, bodies fitted like pieces of melted glass.

"I shall make us beautiful."

Soft and slow, as though in apology.

She understands.

She understands the trembling in your limbs, the hesitation lingering in your breath. She understands the fear that knots itself into your chest, into your pulse, into the way your fingers twitch yet refuse to pull away.

And so—

She suffers with you.

She bleeds with you.

She shares in your pain as if it were her own, taking it into herself with love. The roses demand something more, their thorned embrace tightening around her just as they do you. She is no freer than you are —another prisoner ensnared in the grasp of something far greater, far older. But where you resist, she welcomes.

Where you falter—

She offers.

And instead of fighting—

You do, too.

Your hands move, trembling, hesitant. The moment your fingertips

graze her skin, the vines react—not loosening, not yielding, but shifting. There is a silent question woven into their thorns.

Will you offer yourself willingly?

And you do.

Your hands explore her form, tracing the contrast between where she is flesh and where she is not. Warm skin meets your touch, soft and smooth, but as your fingers trail further, the texture shifts—torn, uneven, something more than human. Something blooming. The ridges of her body are unnatural, almost pulsing beneath your fingertips.

She leans into your touch, weeping.

A sob rips from her throat, the tears that spill from her eyes becoming even more numerous. They flow like a never ending tap, staining her lips, slipping past parted teeth. They fall between you, splattering against the roses below. The flowers drink deep, blooming richer and fuller.

"Beloved—oh, beloved—" Her voice yearns. "Dost thou mean it? Dost thou offer thyself to me, truly?"

She clings to you, as if terrified you might vanish, as if this moment is but a dream that will slip through her fingers if she does not hold tight enough.

And when your hands dig deeper into her body—when your fingers slip past where flesh meets vine, pressing into the very core of her being.

Joy.

Her lips return to your skin, fervent, worshipful. She kisses along the wounds she has left, tracing over them with her tongue, savoring, indulging. The sensation is dizzying, unbearable—a blur of sharpness and warmth, of pain and something richer, deeper, headier.

She exhales against your throat, voice trembling, breathless. Before leaning all the way back

Another slow, languid press of her lips, parting to spill something thick, something syrupy against your tongue. It drips from her mouth to yours, so warm, so sweet, so rich,. The taste coats your throat,

seeps into your veins, and at once, burning euphoria.

Heat spreads through your limbs. Your pulse quickens, hammering in your skull, in your fingertips, in every place she has touched. The pain dulls into something distant, something pliant, something that makes your body feel so beautifully light.

She watches you with wide, gleaming eyes, anticipation carved into her every breath.

"Ahh… doth it not taste of ambrosia, mine beloved? Doth it not make thee shudder, make thee yearn, make thee feel as though thou art aflame?" Her lips brush against your ear, her voice barely more than a whisper. "This gift I bestow upon thee… wilt thou not drink deeper? Wilt thou not take all that I offer? To take me into thyself?"

She releases you fully, untangling herself from you as the vines begin to lift you into the over top the bed. To which she stands atop the thorns, uncaring of how they pierce through her feet like knives. Their bloody tips over the green, like the white snow atop mountains.

She begins to strip herself of her remaining clothing, tearing away at everything she can easily reach. The various sized pieces of torn fabric falling amongst the flowers and thorns, before being pulled under and disappearing under their constant movement.

And with the simple motion of her hand, the vines that make up the bed begin to crawl up her legs. They clump together, securing themselves around her hips in the form of a harness. And when she puts a hand to it and pulls outwards they follow, forming a rough phallic shape made up of the thicker vines, their thorns not as sharp. They more resemble large nubs over the extension, simply serving as a means of intercourse, a replication of a tool required for carnal stimulation.

She drags her hand across the length of it, a faint sticky substance beginning to coat it as if being released from the vines. It's a decently big size, your eyes widening at the sight as you look to her. But before you can make a comment about it she reaches out to assure you,

She then takes a kneeling stance directly below you, raising her arms up high as if to a benevolent god to accept an offered prayer. And you are dropped to her, the vines cutting themselves to leave you with simple hand and feet cuffs.

She catches you in her arms, her eyes never deviating for a second as

you are coddled into her arms.

Her hands cradle your head now, her thumbs stroking along your cheekbones with a tenderness that nearly burns.

The length vines at her waist, is pressed into your back comfortably. The wet heat of the slick sap, strangely nice on your skin.

"Shhh, mine dearest one… fret thee not… I shall ease thee, I shall make thee whole," she croons. "Thou needst not suffer—nay, I shall not allow it. I shall not see thee in pain when there is beauty, when there is succor I may offer."

She gently cups one of her own breasts, squeezing lightly. The mound of flesh, the petals under her hand deep and rich in color, velvety in texture, folding open with a languid grace as if roused from slumber.

From the center of her teat drips something golden, thick and glistening, its scent heady, sweet, intoxicating as various droplets surface from the skin.

She lifts it toward you, guiding it close, pressing its mouth against yours with a gentleness that borders on desperation.

"Drink," she urges, her fingers threading into your hair, cradling the back of your head. "Oh, beloved, please… wilt thou not drink for me? Wilt thou not take this gift, this blessing? It is thine by right, by fate, by the will of the very earth that bears thee."

Your lips part. You do not know whether it is by choice or because she wills it so.

The nectar spills onto your tongue.

It is warm, almost unbearably so, the same as the stuff laced in her kiss. But it is so much silkier as it enters your throat, seeps into every crevice of your being. Any and all sensations are dulls immediately, melting into a feeling that is neither numbness nor mere relief but something deeper—something like sinking into the embrace of a long-forgotten dream.

The aches, the wounds, the lingering burn of her teeth and the vines that had once sought to restrain you—they are all distant now, wrapped in something soft, something safe.

She watches you, enraptured, her fingers petting through your hair,

down your back, soothing.

"Yes… oh, yes, that is it, mine dearest one. Does it not feel better? Does it not feel right?" She hums, delighted, her lips ghosting along your temple, your cheek. "Ah, thou art trembling still—poor thing, poor beloved thing…"

She gathers you in her arms, pulling you against her, holding you as one might hold a scared animal.

"Fear not… fear not, mine love, for I am here. I shall hold thee, I shall keep thee, I shall soothe thee 'til naught but bliss remains. Oh, I shall pet thee and kiss thee and whisper to thee the sweetest of words—"

Her hands move, tracing slow, languid paths along your spine, pressing circles into your skin, rubbing away the last remnants of tension.

"There, there… drink more, mine beloved, take thy fill—there is plenty, always plenty, and all of it is thine."

The flower pulses in time with your breath. The nectar flows.

And she, your keeper, your captor, your savior, holds you close, petting you, murmuring lullabies of devotion, rocking you gently in her arms.

You feel one of her arms drape across your side, reaching around to gloss across your stomach. But this time they continue further, down into the confines of your pants as her deft fingers feel around.

You are sopping wet at this point, already having been through several orgasms of your own. So it does not take much effort to slip a couple fingers inside of you, touching gently and slowly as she seeks your approval. Testing if you are ready yet, prepared to proceed with the rest of the carnal ritual to take place.

"Shhhh," she murmurs, her voice a soft, shivering plea. "Drink more. Thee art naught but to enjoy, you needn't do anything else."

The nectar keeps spilling into your mouth, it spreads warmth from the pit of your stomach to the very tips of your fingers.

Your body sways, unsteady and unmoored. The world around you feels distant, hazy, painted in deep hues of red and gold, petals shifting beneath you like the crest of a tide.

"Ahh… yes… yes, mine beloved…" Her breath hitches, her grip tightening. "I see it now—'tis within thee, it spreads, it takes root! Ah, dost thou not feel it? The way it embraces thee? The way it fills thee with warmth? Oh, beloved, thou art made to be adorned in such beauty—"

Her fingers trail lower, ghosting along the column of your throat, feeling the way your pulse pounds against your skin.

"Do not fear," she soothes, voice trembling with something feverish, something starved. "Thine body knows what it must do. Thine blood hums in its awakening."

Another breath, her fingers drawing themselves out of your pants, only to glisten in the light of the room with your clear fluids.

"Let it guide thee."

The vines shift.

She flips you over with ease, pressing her chest against your back, shielding you from the light of the room as she brings your hips back towards her own. Her arms encircle you, anchoring you to her feverish warmth as the vines tighten once more, constricting, claiming. Yet even as they demand more, she fights against them, defying their insatiable hunger if only to grant you the solace of her touch.

The false skin that once rendered her human peels away in the struggle—ripped, discarded, meaningless. Beneath it, she is something other, something divine in its unshackled form, and yet—

You do not recoil, you do not fear, because she is not a monster, a gnarled and hateful being comprised of the damnable flora that keeps you here.

No she is not a monster

She is Don Quixote.

The press of her bare form against yours is near suffocating, the heat of her body melding with your own until the line between you blurs. You can feel everything—her trembling breath against your ear, the shuddering gasp she swallows back, the way the cluster of vines at her hips enters you. Connecting you together in a carnal act, annexation between the two bodies who wish to commit to one another the soul.

"Mine beloved… mine beloved, oh—" Her voice is wrecked. "I shall never let thee go. I shall never abandon thee. I shall never forsake thee."

And so the two of you bask in the throes of making love you come to understand, just how deep that longing solitude had kept her in madness. For as you hold her, for as you brace yourself against the bedding of roses beneath.

She does not stop.

Not when your body weakens.

Not when your breath turns shallow, when exhaustion drags at your limbs, turning every motion sluggish, every thought hazy.

Not even when your consciousness frays, slipping through your grasp like sand through parted fingers.

She continues to move, and thrust into you passionately.

Her body does not falter, does not tire, does not yield to the same mortal limits that chain you. Where you are flesh and fragility, she is rigid like a thorn.

Even as sleep claims you, even as your body surrenders, her warmth never leaves. Her weight is constant, her presence inescapable. And though your mind is lost to the abyss of slumber, she does not stop.

She remains.

"Ah… thou art weary, mine love?"

Her voice is gentle, touched with amused affection, as if she has all the time in the world. As if she has already devoted eternity to you. Her lips ghost over your temple, her breath fanning warmly against your skin.

"Worry not. I shall continue for thee."

The slow, rhythmic press of her form does not cease. Even as the trembles of an orgasm grace your form, as you clamber onto her and hold tight to ride out the waves of oncoming pleasure. She will hold you and wait to move again.

Even in slumber, you are kept.

And when you wake—

She is still there.

Still wrapped around you.

Still moving.

The air is thick, suffocating with the scent of roses and sap, cloying, intoxicating, inescapable. The petals beneath you are damp, sticky with sweat, with tears, with blood. The golden light of flickering candles casts long shadows against the writhing mass of vines that coil ever tighter, ever hungrier.

Your breath stutters as reality filters back in through the haze of exhaustion—

Because she is there.

Because she has never left.

The press of her body against yours is feverishly warm, the weight of her presence overwhelming. Her arms remain locked around you, her fingers still mapping every inch of your form as if rediscovering you anew. And though you blink blearily up at her, dazed, spent, she only hums in greeting, nuzzling into the crook of your throat with a contented sigh.

"Good morrow, mine love."

Her voice is light, lilting, as if she has merely woken beside you after a peaceful rest. As if she has not spent countless hours tirelessly holding you, sinking into you, worshiping you in ways that have left you raw and aching. There is no exhaustion in her tone, no weariness—no evidence that she has ever once stopped.

"Ah, but thou didst slumber so sweetly," she murmurs, her fingers slipping through your damp hair, stroking, petting. "I could not bear to wake thee. Thou wert so peaceful, so divine, even in surrender."

You part your lips, but the words die before they can form.

She shushes you before you can even think to try again.

A kiss steals your breath, the taste of that delectable sap on her tongue.

"Thou hast no need for words," she whispers against your lips, "only to feel. Only to accept."

And when hunger gnaws at your stomach—

The roses know.

The vines shift, presenting their offering—a massive bloom, its petals peeling back to reveal its bounty. Dark, glistening fruit, theflesh soft and swollen, nectar dripping thick and sluggish from their rinds.

You hesitate.

But she smiles.

And the way she watches you, the way her red eyes gleam with love so fierce—

You eat.

Because her approval is something you crave more than you fear the truth of what you consume.

"Ah… mine beloved, dost thou feel it?" Her voice lilts with breathless wonder, her hands never ceasing their worship. Lifting your body into a new position from which to bury into you. "The roses sing, the vines rejoice—for they know. They know thou art meant to be here. Even if they could not accept it at first."

The bloom beneath you trembles, its petals curling inward, wrapping around the both of you like clasped hands in prayer. The air is thick with the heady scent of roses, sweet and overpowering, drowning out all reason, all thought. The vines have completely released you at this point and Don gazes down at you with eyes too bright, too alive.

"Ah, but thou art so weak…" She hums, her fingers trailing over your cheek, pressing against your skin. "Fear not, mine love. I shall be thy strength. I shall bear thee through this trial, as I have always done. As I shall always do."

She has not tired.

Not once.

Not even when your body has failed you time and time again, when exhaustion has claimed you, dragging you into unconsciousness.

Every time you wake, she is still within.

You do not know how much time has passed. If time even holds meaning here.

You try to speak—to say something, anything—but your voice is little more than a rasp. Dry. Hollow. Thirst coils in your throat, burning, unbearable.

Your limbs feel weightless.

Your head lolls back against the petals.

Don shudders, exhaling a tremulous sigh, her fingers threading through your hair, her lips pressing kisses—feverish, lingering—along your jaw, your throat, your collar. "Again," she whispers, "Please accept me again. Please receive this love upon thy—" She nuzzles against your pulse, inhaling deeply, savoring. Before pushing fully into you again, as she pins you to the bedding, the feeling you know all to well. Whatever it is that comprises her blood, her saliva, her tears, it is within the vines too.

That amber sap, the feeling of the vines pumping as it is delivered into your body yet again.

"Prithee, bear thyself for me once more."

And then, she begins to pick up your body again, resuming the movements of her own.

Again.

And again.

And again.

The cycle repeats.

She never tires.

Not even when you have fallen limp beneath her.

Not even when your voice has gone hoarse, when your breath shudders on every exhale.

Not even when your body has given out.

She does not stop.

Because she cannot.

Because she loves you so dearly.

And you—

You are beginning to understand.

Because when your trembling fingers reach for her, when your hands curl against her back, nails raking lightly over skin that is not quite human, you feel the same fever, the same strength, the same insatiable hunger thrumming beneath your own skin.

Something is changing.

Something has already changed.

Your chest heaves, your breaths shallow, uneven. And yet, your fingers twitch with a strange, restless energy. The ache in your limbs does not fade, yet beneath the exhaustion, something else stirs. Something familiar.

You raise your hand.

A single nail drags across your palm, slow, deliberate.

And when your skin parts—

It is not blood that spills, not as you have known it.

The liquid that wells from the wound is thick, gleaming like dark honey. Crimson, yes, but deeper, richer.

And when the first tear slips down your cheek, heavy with emotion, with revelation, it is the same red.

Don inhales sharply.

Then she smiles.

A slow, radiant thing, as she ceases her movement. Leaning back before falling at your side.

"Ah…" Her fingers brush against the wound, smearing the crimson. "Mine beloved."

The roses bloom.

And Don, with all the tenderness in the world, presses a kiss to your trembling fingers.

The bed of thorns unfurls, the petals parting into a great flower. A massive bloom rises from the tangled mess of vines and brambles, its enormous petals curling outward, Its color—red, but laced with black at the edges, pulsing with an unnatural, living glow—captures the dim light of the manor, turning the chamber into something otherworldly. As they close over top of the bed.

A sacrificial altar.

A cradle of devotion.

A coffin, meant for two.

Chapter End Notes

Second shameless discord plug please join so we can have more oomfs

https://discord.gg/GPBNYYxExz

End Notes

Also I got a few questions regarding why I leave all the planned nsfw stuff for the second chapters

It's because I want people who might not really like the nsfw parts to also be able to enjoy a portion of the stories for their favorite IDs

Also cause I've never wrote smut before lol but I'm learning as I go

Hope you enjoyed

Also if anyone knows a good website I can use for polls for future fics lemme know thanks

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!